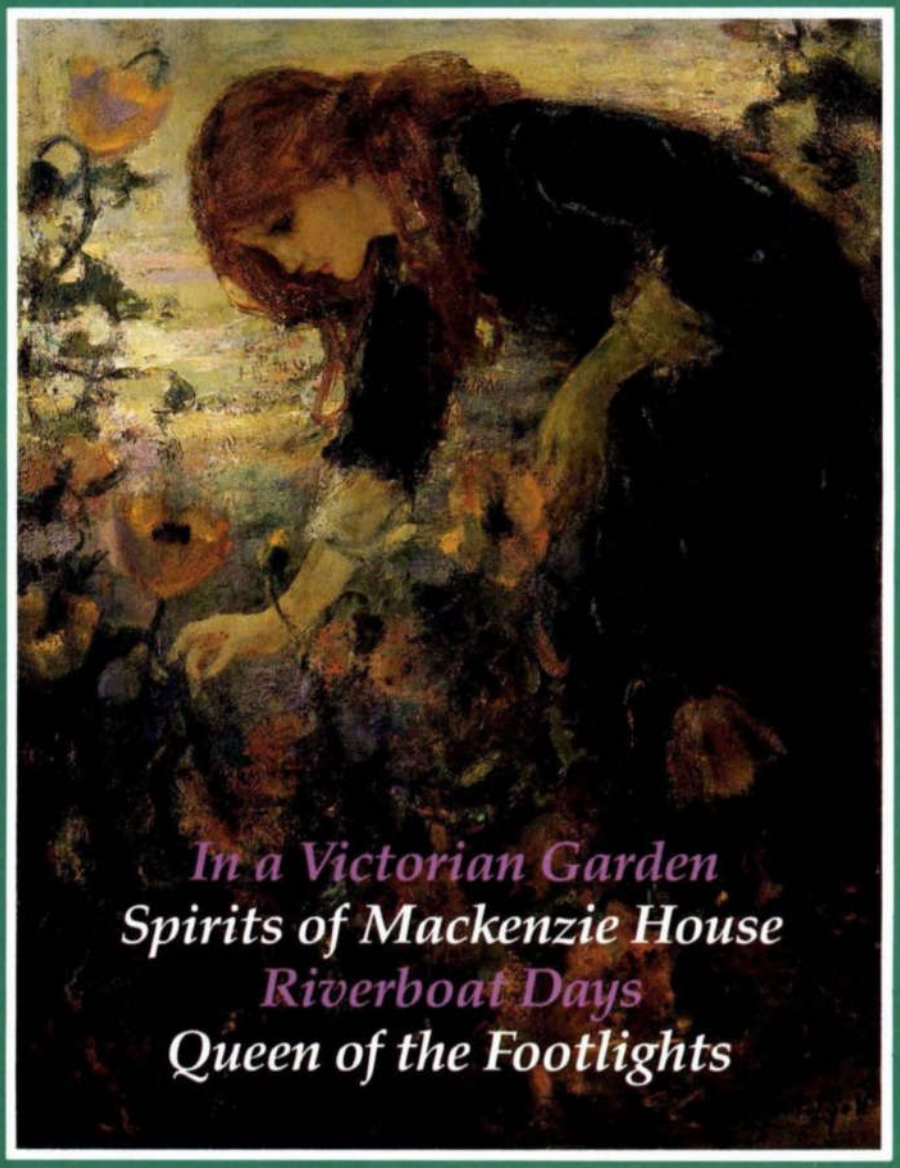
December 1989/January 1990/$3.75

# The Beaver

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

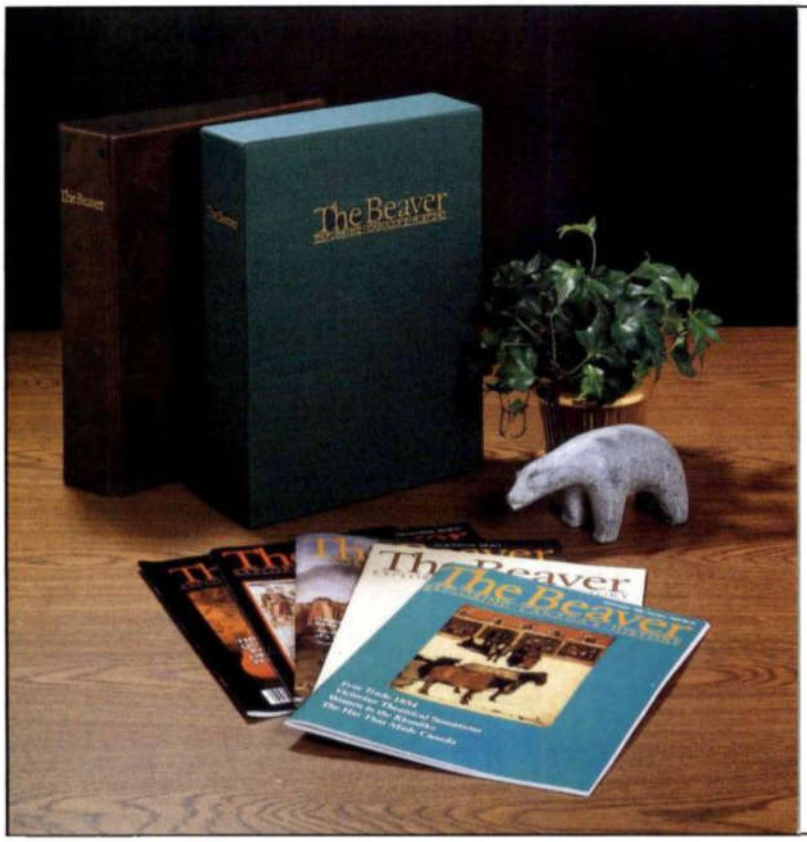


*In a Victorian Garden*

*Spirits of Mackenzie House*

*Riverboat Days*

*Queen of the Footlights*

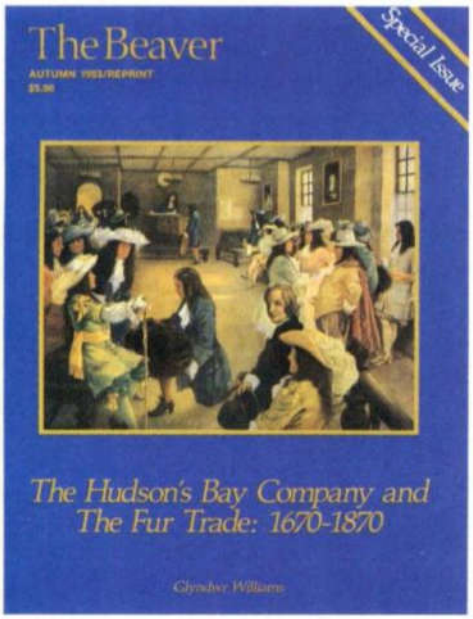



# Preserve our History

Protect your back issues of *The Beaver* in our handsome brown **Beaver Binder**. Each sturdy vinyl binder holds six to eight issues and is priced at $12.00, postage paid.

*Something new!* The **Beaver Slipcase,** covered in attractive green fabric, holds 12 issues and is available at $13.00, postage paid. Both binder and slipcase are embossed with elegant gold lettering and fit current and slightly larger back issues of *The Beaver.*

Send a cheque or money order to Beaver Binders, c/o *The Beaver,* 450 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3C 0E7.




**THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY AND THE FUR TRADE 1670-1870**

By GLYNDWR WILLIAMS

86 pages. Illustrated

The reprint edition of the Autumn 1983 issue of *The Beaver* is now available at the following prices:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Orders of | 1 - 9 copies | $5.00 each |
| | 10 - 49 copies | $4.00 each |
| | 50 or more | $3.00 each |

Prices include postage and handling.

Send cheque or money order payable to

THE BEAVER,
450 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Man.
Canada R3C 0E7

**December 1989/ January 1990**
*Vol. 69:6*
*Issued November 1989*
**$3.75**

**Editor:**
Christopher Dafoe
**Managing Editor:**
Carol Preston

**Advertising Representative:**
Sandra Waller
496 Cranbrooke Ave.,
North York, Ontario,
M5M 1N7
(416) 782-7401.

**Advisory Board:**
Shirlee A. Smith
Michael Bliss
William Nobleman
Rolph Huband

**Cover:**
"Oriental Poppies" by Laura Muntz Lyall (1860-1930). Art Gallery of Ontario.

THE BEAVER: Exploring Canada's History (ISSN 0005-7517) is published bi-monthly by The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay, known as the Hudson's Bay Company, 450 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 0E7. (204) 786-7048.

U.S. MAILING ADDRESS: THE BEAVER Magazine, c/o H.A. & J.L. Wood, Inc., Box 329, Pembina, North Dakota 58271-0329.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: (6 issues) $19 (Canada and United States). SINGLE COPY $3.75. OTHER COUNTRIES ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION $25.

SECOND-CLASS MAIL REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1401.

CANADIAN POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE BEAVER Magazine, 450 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0E7.

U.S. SECOND-CLASS MAIL REGISTRATION NUMBER: USPS 759-610.

U.S. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE BEAVER Magazine, c/o H.A. & J.L. Wood, Inc., Box 329, Pembina, North Dakota 58271-0329.

Second class postage paid at Winnipeg and at additional mailing office.

While every care will be taken of manuscripts and illustrations submitted, no liability will be assumed for loss.

COPYRIGHT © 1989 by Hudson's Bay Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction without written permission of the publisher is strictly forbidden.

PRINTED IN CANADA

# The Beaver

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

**6** IN A VICTORIAN GARDEN
Yesterday's flowers bloom again.
BY COLIN BECKINGHAM

**16** THE HAUNTING OF MACKENZIE HOUSE
Is it a ghost or just the spirit of an age?
BY CHRIS RAIBLE

**23** THE STAR FROM HAMILTON
The enchanting Julia Arthur thrilled audiences at home and abroad.
BY CHERYL MACDONALD

**30** PADDLE WHEELS ON THE PRAIRIES
Great steamers plied the "sea of grass" before the trains came.
BY BRUCE WISHART

**37** ROADS TO RUIN
A crusty Victorian takes a dim view of the Young Dominion.
BY JACK PEACH

**44** BOOKS IN REVIEW: Wars, traders, pioneers and curlers.

**62** THE PACKET: A military back-biter.

## VICTORIAN MEMORIES

# Victorian Memories

What was the past really like? Can we ever really know? One hundred years is no great length of time in human affairs. It represents little more than a single lifetime, and yet the events of a century past often seem as remote as the events of 10 centuries ago.

It is the human element that brings the past closer to us. The "facts" of history are hard to get at, even after a mere century. Like the ant on the Persian carpet, we see only a part of the pattern and what we see depends on the angle of view. Often what we see is distorted by our desire to see something else. The human element broadens our perspective and helps to make the past live again.

Who were the people who walked our streets and used our buildings before we came? In many cases, they were people we once knew. The Victorian Age is as close to us as our grandparents and great grandparents. There are people still alive who remember John A. Macdonald and Wilfrid Laurier and we can catch a glimpse of that time through their eyes and learn something of an age that played so great a part in the making of Canada.

History is a great ocean of time that laps at our feet. It can give pleasure and amusement in its details, but it also offers us something important and wonderful. In its basic form, history is a study of what happened, why it happened and what it means. The historian seeks an elusive truth, like a person groping in a dark room. The past can only be partly known to us. Close enough to touch, it is always, somehow, just out of reach. History is also the study of men and women, the study of humanity. Knowing the men and women of the past, we learn something about ourselves.

In this issue of *The Beaver* we look back through time toward Canada in the Age of Victoria and catch a glimpse of Toronto in the Victorian twilight as seen through the jaundiced eye of the crusty Edward Peach; we meet a great actress of the age who was born in Hamilton, acted with Irving and who became a star on both sides of the Atlantic; we catch sight of great steamboats moving across the prairies and — going farther back — we meet an obscure but nevertheless important old Canadian at work in a Victorian garden. We pay, as well, a Christmas visit to the home of William Lyon Mackenzie and catch, perhaps, a ghostly glimpse of the old rebel as we climb the stairs. This is Old Canada, seen by gaslight.

*Two Girls Reading, 1898, gouache on linen, by William Brymner.*

# In a Victorian Garden

By COLIN BECKINGHAM

The gardener bends down and blows carefully on the charcoal ember brought from the kitchen stove. The sudden glow warms his face on this cool May morning. The dry tinder catches, and in minutes the pile of prunings from the orchard is crackling away, almost as noisy as the crows high in the canopy of the oak tree. A mound of fresh stable manure fumes quietly nearby, ready for barrowing to the compost heap. A gentle breeze is blowing from Lake Ontario, fanning the new tree leaves into growth and the twig blaze into a smokeless roar. The 1849 gardening season is beginning in earnest.

The first job today is to mix some wood ashes in water and paint the bark of the trees in the orchard. Overwintering insects can be a problem, and this will help to discourage them. As he applies the solution with a rag wetted in a pail, he checks the grafting work completed a month earlier. Apple tree flowers are on the point of bursting open, the little pink flush of the Tommy Sweets, Russets, and Spys visible at the tip of the buds.

Around him the grass is greening fast and will soon need to be scythed. In his mind's eye he can see the garden helper who, in a few weeks, will be carefully working the cutting edge of the scythe blade down as sharp as a razor. He also remembers the easy swing and sweep of the cutting motion and the "ching" of the metal blade as it arcs effortlessly through the grass. There are weeds, but they are of no concern here. There are other things to worry about.

In the vegetable garden the ridges left to overwinter after the deep fall digging have become rounded by the spring rains, but the soil is visibly fine and fertile, the erosion trapped in the furrows. Later, the first pipe of the day finished, he turns his attention to the stable-waste waiting outside the door of the coach house.

Moving a pile of manure takes time. The fork is missing a tine, but the steady motion soon has the compost loaded for transporting. The bare iron wheel on the barrow sings as it grinds and crunches its way along the gravel driveway to the garden. The sun rises higher, perspiration flows freely, and the gardener takes off his heavy smock. A maid, busy sweeping the back porch, stops for a moment to call out some encouragement. The gardener grunts to himself in reply.

A century and a half later his clothes will seem very odd, but in the here and now they are quite practical.

The coarse material of his shirt does not breathe well, but is loose-fitting so that the air can circulate. Most of his shirts are of the "drop-shoulder" style that fits very loosely but is useful in the sense that one size fits nearly all. They also allow great freedom of movement for the shoulders and arms. Apart from the hottest days the sleeves are worn long. The pants, equipped in convenient places with button-up flaps (or "falls"), are also heavy, held up by a leather suspender. He used to have a pair, but one wore out at the button-hole after years of fastening to a trouser button that was rather too large for the hole. The suspenders, while essential, are not very practical in that they frequently slip off the shoulders unless tied up with a wisp of straw.

Leather shoes are comfortable for the feet, but the protective hob-nails in the soles that wear so well give poor grip on a flagstone surface. Without socks the feet toughen up, insensitive to cold and sharp stones

that find their way inside. He frequently gardens in bare feet.

The greatest blessing is the hat. Made of straw with a wide brim, it is tall to allow air to circulate, and keeps the head cool on the sunniest days. It is not clear whether chefs learned this fact from gardeners or vice-versa. Perhaps the gardener was first, since the carrot must be grown before it can be cooked.

The day starts at six in the morning and ends at six in the evening. Local church bells chime the times to help the workman regulate his working day. The pace is not pressured by anything other than the knowledge that if the crop is small, empty bellies or a dull diet will make the winter seem longer than it usually is. He breaks for lunch at twelve. Field workers would take their food with them, but this gardener works close to home, and so has time to leave the place of employment and walk home to a hot meal.

It is a rather lonely life. He has company during the busiest times of the year, when a helper comes in to lighten the load. Working outside for a large part of his life, he has become accustomed to anticipating the behaviour of the weather. In the land of the short spring, it is important to get the sowing done as soon as practicable.

Many gardeners feel that the influence of the moon is important in the sowing of seed. They sow as the moon wanes, then profit later from the waxing moon to draw the plants up strongly as they begin to germinate and emerge from the soil. The planting and uprooting of trees is timed similarly either to encourage good growth or discourage the regrowth from disturbed rootstocks.

The manuals counsel the gardener to "sow thickly". With the virgin forest for a back yard, there are plenty of pests who feel entitled to share the crop, even before it is fully grown. Rabbits, groundhogs, mice, and squirrels ravage beds of sunflowers, curly kale, and buckwheat.

Watering plants is another time consuming procedure. A reliable well at the bottom of the terrace provides water that has to be pumped up by vigorous arm bending. A wooden yoke that fits loosely around the neck permits him to carry (precariously) two pails at a time to the more remote planted areas. The sides of the pails slope inwards to limit the slopping effect of the brim-full buckets.

The day always ends with care and attention to the tools. Rust forms easily, and since the design of the tool and the material of which it is constructed are not

Courtesy of the Superintendent, Bellevue House

*The ornamental garden, Bellevue House, Kingston. John A. Macdonald rented the house from a prosperous grocer in 1848, calling it, in jest, "Pekoe Pagoda". Others called it Tea Caddy Castle and Molasses Hall. It is now a National Historic Park. The flower painting next to the title on page 6 is by Susanna Moodie (1803-1885) and is called "Tulip, Narcissus, Periwinkle and Fruit Blossoms". It is in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum and is reproduced with permission.*

very strong, constant attention assures that they remain in reliable working condition.

After a day's work the back aches and the legs feel as if they have had enough exercise. After scything, the hands may be blistered or cracked if the snath handle was not adjusted correctly, or the handles unsuited to the user.

This is what it feels like to be a period gardener. There is plenty of fresh air, but the work is very labour-intensive.

* * * *

Living with the limitations of the past is one way of recreating and interpreting history. We soon find out what is possible and what is not. Our idea of the limitations comes from written and other sources left to us by the gardeners of this past age, interpreted with a twentieth-century point of view.

We cannot be sure of all of our details, but perhaps we have a fair composite idea of old gardens and gardeners. Jeanne Minhinnick, the author of *At Home in Upper Canada,* feels that the actual appearance of ordinary country gardens has not changed very much over the years. However the feel of gardening, together with the aids and attitudes of the gardener have changed a lot.

The gardener at Bellevue House in Kingston in 1849 may have experienced a gardening day just like the imagined one above. He was not a very important person. Gardeners or ground-keepers practised a skill too much like the life of a farm labourer to be considered a tradesperson. A number of important gardens are noted on contemporary maps of Kingston that were evidently designed to support the extensive military presence. However the gardener does not appear in an 1846 list of trades actively practised in Kingston.

Gardens were always expected to be productive, to yield fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers for the house. However, when we examine the case of the gardener at Bellevue House more closely, we see that he is a rather privileged fellow. Employed by a wealthy merchant to maintain the grounds of a newly constructed residence, he is among the few Canadian gardeners whose garden provides pleasure as well as the accepted necessities of the orchard and the vegetable plot.

A garden for pleasure indicates that resources are available for leisure as well as work. Since transportation was unreliable at best, local supplies of anything as important as food were highly prized. In some cases, the very health of the local population was at risk. Early communities on Hudson Bay had a great problem with lack of vitamin C in the diet. The small production of greens that was possible in the short growing season (as short as two months free of frost) had very high value in the prevention of scurvy.

*Raking down the gravel drive, Bellevue House, Kingston. The gardener is in nineteenth-century costume. Photo courtesy of the Superintendent, Bellevue House.*

Gardening for enjoyment was more of a European idea. Greater wealth and security of food supply allowed resources to be directed to pleasure gardens if the purse allowed it. In Canada in the mid-1800s some individuals were beginning to accumulate that kind of wealth. Charles Hales, who had Bellevue House constructed in the early 1840s was one such person. At least part of this wealth had been accumulated when Kingston was (transitionally) the seat of the government of the United Provinces of Canada. Kingston was gearing up to portray itself as worthy of such importance.

This is perhaps the beginning of the era in Canada that transferred responsibility for most of the food production onto the shoulders of the farmer, and today allows the gardener time for pleasure and the dedication of his horticultural efforts to the production of the more unusual varieties of foods. The unusual elements lent variety and security to the sometimes dull staple diet that could be purchased from the local farming community.

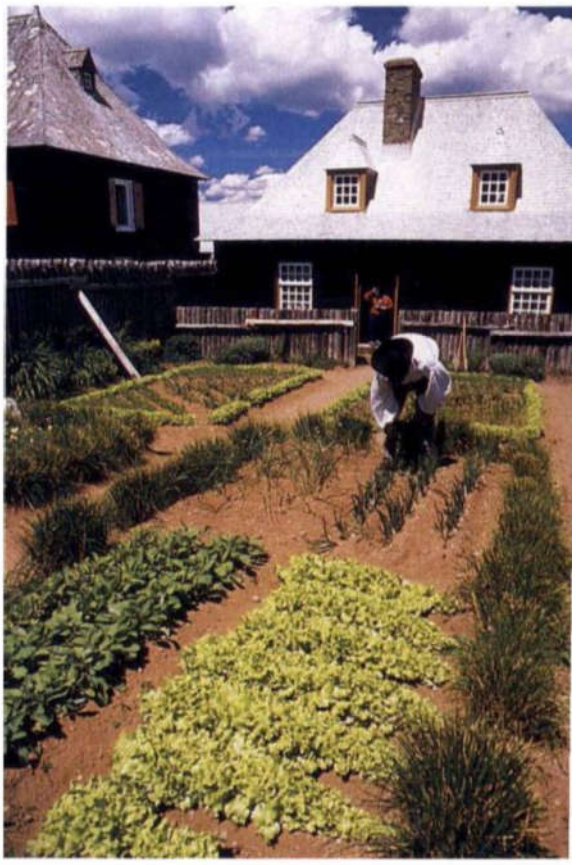
The larger ornamental garden must have been quite rare, the more usual pleasure garden taking the form of the small dooryards filled with hollyhocks and foxgloves transplanted from the wild or received from a neighbour, and tended with pride by the lady of the house.

The skills of the gardeners were very much imported. The indigenous peoples had established very different ways of cultivating crops. Settlers brought with them favourite plants from the home country in the hope that they would be helpful in the new. However, both plants and skills went through a long and frequently painful shake-down period as the new gardener learned to cope with new climatic conditions as well as new crops. Dependence on garden crops that appreciated a long, cool spring had to be changed for others that would germinate fast and then support a long, hot summer.

Machinery was available to lighten the gardening task, if not from local sources of supply, then as imported goods from the United States and Europe. In the mid-1800s lawn mowers (reel type) were becoming available, but were still expensive and quite unusual in a country where men were skilled with the scythe.

The 1849 gardener was also limited by communications. His ideas came principally from local sources, from comparing notes with his neighbour. If he could read, he had access to books and periodicals, but these focused mainly on agricultural topics, which again reflects the bias away from pleasure gardening.

At the time that Bellevue was being constructed the book *A treatise on the theory and practice of landscape gardening: adapted to North America* by A.J. Downing, an architect and landscape designer, was



*A worker in pioneer costume tends the flower garden at Black Creek Pioneer Village, Toronto (top). A gardener hoes the potato crop outside the walls of the former Hudson's Bay Company establishment, Lower Fort Garry, near Winnipeg (lower left). Fresh vegetables flourish in the gardens at the historic Fortress of Louisbourg near Sydney, Nova Scotia (right). Traditional gardens are maintained at historic sites across Canada.*

*Flowers to delight the eye: Sarah Minerva Roys, of Stormont County, Ontario, created this colourful bouquet in the mid-nineteenth century. It is part of the collection at Upper Canada Village, Morrisburg, Ontario.*

popular in North America. It is possible that this work was used as a guide to lay out the grounds at Bellevue. One report on the (then) recently published book noted that: "This treatise is justly regarded as an honour to the country, and it has effected an immense good by inspiring a correct taste for rural improvement, the evidences for which are not unfrequent throughout the land."

J.C. Loudon was another writer based in England whose works were read here. Like Downing's book, it was of interest to the serious gardener, aiming at landscaping on the grander scale.

Local newspapers frequently published articles on horticultural topics that were mainly of a practical nature, presumably addressing the interests of the majority of the readership. Other periodicals were devoted to agriculture. In the Kingston area, the gardener might have looked to the American *Genesee Farmer and Gardener's Journal* which was to be superseded by the *Cultivator*. These journals discussed everything from lime to manures to plant labels and the effect of the moon.

Obtaining supplies was also difficult. A gardener depends mainly on hand tools, seeds, plants, and fertilizers. Montreal was already served by rail from the United States. One advertisement for supplies mentions that the source is ". . . London via Boston per Vermont & Central Railroad . . ." It was more profitable for the merchant to ship low-value goods from Europe in bulk to serve the larger United States market first, and then, indirectly, the Canadian Provinces.

In Kingston it was natural to look south and east for supplies, since water communications were the most convenient and frequently the only choice. Kingston was still an important trans-shipment port, with good access to Montreal through the St. Lawrence, to Rochester across Lake Ontario, and to the Ottawa River via the Rideau canal.

Rail communication was in its infancy. The Grand Trunk Railway was not chartered until 1852, after the construction of Kingston's Bellevue House and garden, but was soon to provide rail service through the Toronto-Montreal corridor.

Some tools could be made, or at least repaired, locally, with the highest quality of tools imported.

Seeds were frequently brought in from England. Many advertisements appeared in the newspapers offering seeds "warranted to be fresh and of the last season's growth". The choice of seed varieties was limited compared to today. A comparison of an 1845 advertisement for perennials with a standard 1989 seed

catalogue shows 15 varieties available in the former, compared to over forty in the latter.

To buy seeds, one went to the druggist. William Lyman and Sons of St. Paul Street in Montreal, and Noble Palmer of the Market Square in Kingston, both druggists, were also regular advertisers in their respective cities, supplying fresh garden seed. The connection with the druggist also underlines the importance of the herb garden as a source of medicines.

Plants were also imported, but due to their bulkiness were more likely to be propagated in North America, close to the market. In Kingston, advertisements and catalogues for New York State nurseries were as common as those from the Toronto area, mainly due to the ease of transportation by water. At least one Hamilton nursery business was advertising in Montreal.

One exception to the rule of few imported plants appears to be the importation of flowering bulbs, which as early as 1848 were coming to North America from Holland. In Montreal, Hyacinths, Tulips, Narcissus, Crocus, and Gladiolus were available.

The mid-1800s was in fact a period of rapid growth in the nursery business, marked by an increase in both the number of nurseries offering plants and the number of different plants offered at each location, ready for shipment by rail or water to distant local communities. The rapid growth was greatly due to the sudden expansion of railway transportation, which was to increase dramatically following the creation of the Grand Trunk Railway.

Settlers were amazed at the fertility of the newly-cleared areas, but were increasingly seeing declining crops, and therefore looking for means of reinvigorating their impoverished soils.

The value of manures had been known for some time, of course. But man is ever impatient for the magic potion that will solve all the problems at once and in a short time. The following advertisement appeared in the Kingston *British Whig* in 1845:

> Guano for sale : Persons wishing to have a first rate crop of Turnips, or any one having lost their crop with the frost, would do well to call and get a bag of the celebrated Guano, from the Island of Ichaboe, to be had of the subscriber. J. Carruthers, Office on Green's Wharf.

The value of ploughing in crops as green manures was also appreciated, but was still at the stage of experimentation. One of the quick-growing crops used for this purpose was buckwheat.

Knowing the limitations of the situation defines the boundaries within which a historic interpreter must work. By accumulating information on what a gardener may have had in the way of equipment and supplies to do his job, an interpretive site can set up a static display of received knowledge.

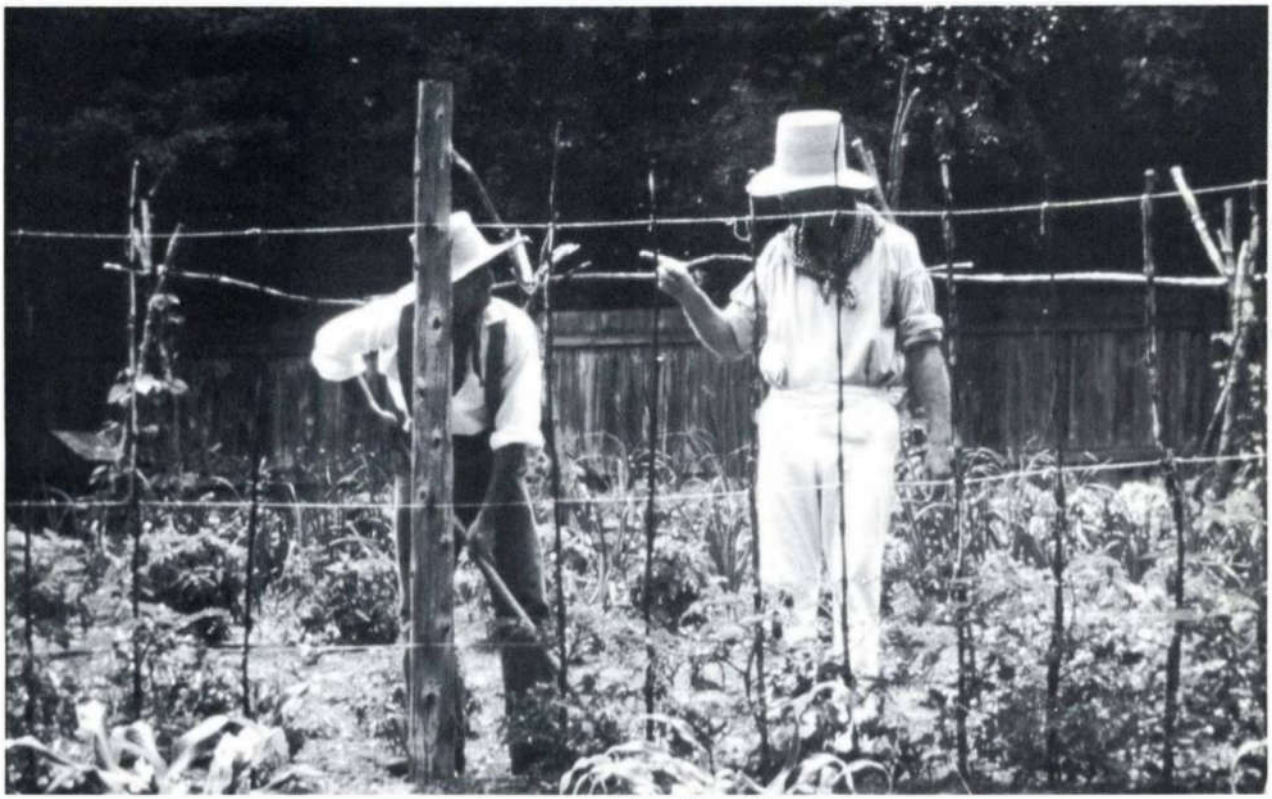
A static display can become dynamic if we look further, into the way the gardener thinks. It is rather more difficult to see inside his mind, to judge how he would have thought about problems and his approach to solutions.

There was nothing easy about the gardening life in the lower echelons of the gardening ranks. As Susanna Moodie noted:

> Our garden was well dug and plentifully manured, the woman bringing the manure, which had lain for several years at the barn door, down to the plot in a large Indian basket placed upon a hand-sleigh.

In common with all gardeners they were sure to have felt some pride in their achievements. Susanna Moodie was proud of her garden: "I have contemplated a well-hoed ridge of potatoes . . . with as much delight as . . . examining a fine painting . . ."

On occasion, the pride was dashed by the appearance of pests and other uncontrollable events. Modern gardeners often enquire whether the nineteenth-century gardener had as much of a problem as gardeners do today with pests. Whether he did to the same extent is something that is not easily measured. The *Cultivator* mentions that "The diseases and enemies to which the apple tree is subject, are generally not formidable." There are some pest problems mentioned in the literature that show that there were some insects and fungi to be concerned about. What is even more interesting than the problem is the proposed solution to the problem, a very definite clue to the way the gardener thought.



Courtesy of the Superintendent, Bellevue House

*Gardeners at work, Bellevue House, Kingston.*

Frost is one of the uncontrollable events. It was well known that a fruit crop would be reduced if the flowers were frosted at a critical stage in their development. One recommended way of avoiding frost damage on a cool spring night was to take a heavy, wetted hempen rope and throw it over the tree. In this way, it was reasoned, the frost would be conducted away from the top of the tree into the ground.

In the field of pest control, the curculio had been noted as a pest on the plum. The recommended means of dealing with the problem was "the pig and poultry remedy and the jarring mode". The pigs and poultry would pick up the infected fruit from the ground, then the insects would be jarred out of the tree, to fall onto sheets spread on the ground. The orchardist had to be careful to jar the tree by striking with a heavy mallet on a sawn-off stump of a branch.

One favourite question put to the period gardener in modern times is whether apple scab was as common a century and a half ago as it is today. We can say that there is not as much mention of scab as there is of other pests like the American Blight. This does not necessarily mean that there was no scab, since it is possible that the scab was so difficult to control that the disease was taken as inevitable, and the scabby parts were simply cut out at the kitchen table. Another possibility is that the scab had not spread to the hinterlands of the settled parts, and that there was less infection than today when the distances the infecting vector has to travel are much shorter.

Pruning was the subject of some of the contributions to the *Cultivator*. Subscribers were informed that it was best to keep the fruit tree under control with judicious pruning to keep the crown at a manageable height, and after pruning to cover the wounds with a mixture of brick dust and warm tar.

Grafting was very commonly practised. The grafting methods have remained almost unchanged over the century and a half. Catherine Parr Traill offers the following mixture for grafting wax: ". . . one part of common beef tallow; two parts bees' wax; and four parts resin. Melt the whole together, pour into a pail of cold water; rub a little of the grease on your hands, to prevent the wax from sticking, then as it cools work it well with your hands. . ."

A quick review of these examples of garden thinking tempts us to imagine that the gardener was doing the right things for the wrong reason. The reasoning appears to have a non-scientific basis. Centuries of practice showed what had positive results and what did not.

*The Beaver / 14*

The value of herbs had been known for centuries. It is not easy to decide how important an herb garden would have been in a town the size of Kingston. This town may have had reasonably free access to herbs by virtue of its status as one of the larger trans-shipment ports of the Great Lakes. On the other hand, it is always useful to have some fresh supplies handy, and in a sense, the larger, wealthier garden owes a duty to less fortunate neighbours.

Any garden situation in 1849 should be seen from a pre-Darwinian viewpoint. Today it is hard not to be a scientific gardener. A century and a half ago is sufficiently far back to place us in the era of the mysterious gardener, the gardener who learned by pure experience, trial and error, and what he could glean from his elders.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect to tie down is that of superstition. In the absence of scientific thought, and surrounded by a rather wild and unproductive hinterland, there was only religion to explain away the unexplainable.

It was inevitable that the apprenticeship program should be alive and well in the gardening field. In a formal situation, a boy would work his way up from a pot boy to an assistant to a journeyman gardener, and, after a few years, on to the more advanced positions of under-gardener and eventually master-gardener. However in any developing country there are very few formal situations, and it is likely that gardeners and grounds keepers picked up the elements of their trade slowly and informally, or learned them outside the country. Very few advertisements appear in the newspapers for gardeners of whatever grade, so it is likely that opportunities were assigned easily by word of mouth.

Interpreting Canada's garden history is like walking along a narrow path, bordered by what we know, and what we find out as we proceed.

*Next time you see a gardener in a funny hat, remember that he is presenting history to you. His dress is clearly historic. Perhaps he will explain what he is doing in modern terms so that you can understand, but this spoils the illusion. If you are lucky, he will show you what he is thinking through his behaviour. That way he will be harder to understand, but the historical illusion will remain intact.*

*Should you wish to visit some Canadian historic gardens, here is a list that may be helpful:*

* **Bellevue House National Historic Park,** Kingston recreates the appearance of a former residence of Sir John A. Macdonald in the period 1848-1849, with pleasure, vegetable and herb gardens.

*Hollyhocks, a watercolour by Daniel Fowler, 1869.*

Art Gallery of Ontario

*Mary Hiester Reid, 1898, oil on canvas by G.A. Reid.*

* **Black Creek Pioneer Village,** Toronto, demonstrates village life near Toronto in the early 1800s, with many small gardens attached to individual dwellings, in particular the medicinal garden at the doctor's house, and the herb garden.

* **The Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park,** near Sydney, Nova Scotia, offers a glimpse into life at what was once the largest French fortress and naval base in North America. The period is the summer of 1744. The garden is attached to one of the restored houses in the complex.

* **Lower Fort Garry National Historic Park** is near Winnipeg, Manitoba. The focus of the interpretive programme is the fur trade and the Red River settlement. Part of the presentation involves an agricultural-industrial complex.

* **Upper Canada Village,** Morrisburg, Ontario, has an extensive programme of interpretation of the agricultural, gardening, and other activities of an early Ontario village.

* **Woodside National Historic Park,** Kitchener, Ontario, has been restored to the early 1890s when the William Lyon Mackenzie King family lived there, with an herb garden and grounds restored to the period.

There are many other smaller gardens attached to historic sites across Canada. ♦

---

*Colin Beckingham is a horticulturalist with Environment Canada, Canadian Parks Service, and is currently Head Gardener at Bellevue House National Historic Park in Kingston, Ontario, a former residence of Sir John A. Macdonald.*

# THE HAUNTING Of Mackenzie House

## By Chris Raible

"The most celebrated haunted house in Metropolitan Toronto and perhaps in all of Canada" is how anthologist John Robert Colombo describes Mackenzie House, the last home of the rebel William Lyon Mackenzie. Colombo's book, *Mysterious Canada,* is but one of many over the last thirty years which retell the tales of supposed ghosts at the mid-Victorian home, now a museum run by the Toronto Historical Board. The source of all of them is a 1960 series of front-page articles in the old *Toronto Telegram.*

Whatever the ghost stories may or may not reveal about the supernatural, imbedded in them are clues to historical truths. Although much is known about the public and political life of William Lyon Mackenzie, little is known about his domestic life during his final years when the family occupied the house at 82 Bond Street in downtown Toronto. There is, however, some evidence, and the tales of hauntings actually point up some facts about his family's day-to-day living. The stories are thus useful to illustrate how we confirm our present understanding of the past.

The original *Telegram* reports, written by staff reporter Andrew MacFarlane, quoted caretakers Mr. and Mrs. Alex Dobban and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Edmunds. They told of a series of experiences which they believed were linked to the ghosts of both William Lyon Mackenzie and his wife Isabel. MacFarlane's first story summarized the supposed occurrences:

- *A short frock-coated man whose detailed description seems to match William Lyon Mackenzie has been seen at night in the third-floor bedroom.*
- *A woman, long hair hanging around her shoulders, has appeared on both the second and the third floors.*
- *Mackenzie's printing press, still in working order, but locked so that it cannot be operated, has been heard running in the basement after everyone in the house has gone to bed.*
- *A little "antique" piano has played in the moonlit main parlour after the house was locked and the caretaker's family had retired for the night.*
- *Phantom footsteps have been heard on the building's wooden stairs.*
- *On one occasion, the ghostly lady reached out and slapped a caretaker's wife, leaving three distinct welts on her cheek.*

Although the *Globe and Mail* ignored the news of hauntings at the House, the *Toronto Star* showed immediate interest. It repeated the substance of the *Telegram* stories, but soon followed up by editorializing its skepticism. "Ghosts in Toronto?" it asked rhetorically, "No, just ghost writers!" The *Star* reported that museum officials were embarrassed by the reports: "Those squeaks and rattles were nothing more than the hammering of an eager publicist's typewriter . . .

### Editor and Rebel

William Lyon Mackenzie was born at Dundee, Scotland, on 12 March 1795 and died at Toronto 28 August 1861. He settled in Upper Canada in 1820 and was soon established in business as a printer and journalist, publishing his newspaper, the *Colonial Advocate* from York (Toronto) after the fall of 1824.

Considered a trouble-maker and gadfly by the ruling establishment of Upper Canada, Mackenzie was popular with ordinary people and was elected to the House of Assembly in 1828. In 1834 he became the first mayor of Toronto.

He played a leading role in the Rebellion of 1837 and subsequently spent a dozen years in exile in the United States, returning to Canada with an official pardon in 1849. He resumed his activities in journalism and politics, retiring in 1857. Mackenzie House, at 82 Bond Street in downtown Toronto, was given to Mackenzie and his family by friends in 1858 as a token of their esteem. A grandson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, was Prime Minister of Canada.

Mackenzie House has been restored by the Toronto Historical Board and is open to the public.

The results, they hoped would be swarms of tourists eager to spot the drifting spirits." The paper also quoted one caretaker couple, the Dobbans, as denying the tales. Wrote the editor: "Toronto's ghostly tale turned into a ghastly hoax." (The *Star's* initial dismissal of the ghosts did not, however, become that paper's policy. In the years since the first reports, the paper has often revived them with little effort to discount their veracity.)

Perhaps out of embarrassment, perhaps to calm possible new caretakers, perhaps for more publicity, the museum called on the good offices of the clergy. Accompanied by *Telegram* writer Aubrey Wice, Anglican Archdeacon John Frank went through the house, praying in each room. (A Roman Catholic priest, Wice later confessed, declined to participate, laughing, "Not on your life!") Unable to find an official service of exorcism, the archdeacon composed his own prayers, asking that "any earthbound spirits in the house be released from their travails" and that "mortals in the house be freed of disturbing influences." This "exorcism" convinced Wice that any lingering ghosts were now gone, but the stories would not go away so easily.

Since 1960, these ghost tales have grown somewhat, but nothing new has attracted as much interest as did the first reports. One morning in 1962, carpenters doing extensive restoration on the house found a hangman's noose dangling over the stairway. About the same time caretaker Roger Chicoine confessed he had seen Mrs. Mackenzie's ghost four times in the previous year, but he was apparently not very bothered by her presence. (His predecessor, Mrs. Edmonds, had declared that she was so frightened she had "lost 40 pounds" during her four year residence in the house.) In 1966, caretaker Mrs. Winifred McClary reported strange plumbing occurrences — taps turning themselves on, the toilet flushing itself. As late as 1973, *Toronto Sun* reporter Joe Fisher wrote of the appearance at the house of a "Grey Lady" with cleaner Simone Daviaux hearing the piano playing and acting curator Joan Seymour being startled by strange footsteps and by windows slamming shut.

There have been a number of attempts to prove or disprove the ghosts' existence. When the hauntings were first publicized, *Telegram* reporter MacFarlane spent a night at the house. Soon thereafter a group of spiritualists held a séance. Three years later *Telegram* staff writer Clarke Wallace slept at the house. Various members of the television news media claim also to have stayed overnight. None reported any strange occurrences.

A lengthy article in *Toronto Life* magazine was written in 1966 by "international authority on the supernatural" Eileen Sonin. On her first visit to the house in 1960, in a bedroom she "was seized with the most dreadful feeling of depression," but on returning five years later the "dreadful air of gloom had gone".

Toronto Historical Board

*The William Lyon Mackenzie residence at 82 Bond Street in downtown Toronto, said to be haunted.*

This time, in the room reported as Mackenzie's study, she was "seized with the most horrible choking feeling . . . Terror-stricken I ran downstairs". Neither seizure was confirmed by anyone else.

Author Susy Smith wrote of her visit accompanied by two "warlocks" in November of 1968. Although she personally saw nothing, her accomplices told her that ghosts were present. She also published a photograph as evidence of a strange mist around the piano. The next year, television producer Norm Perry, assisted by New York medium "Mrs. Myers" and ghost expert Hans Holzer, failed to catch the ghost on film. As recently as October 1988, *Toronto Star* reporter Catherine Dunphy visited the house with "psychic clairvoyant" Elizabeth Paddon and "ghostbuster" Ian Currie. Paddon reportedly communicated with the spirit of Mrs. Mackenzie who complained that her furniture had been moved about: "These are private things." Her presence was confirmed by Currie who reportedly convinced her to leave to go to "another world, one in which her husband awaits her".

Author Joe Nickell will have none of this. He makes a profession of discounting stories of the occult. His book *Secrets of the Supernatural* has a full chapter devoted to the haunting of Mackenzie House. In it he

Toronto Historical Board

*Mackenzie House decorated for Christmas: The Kissing Bough.*

Toronto Historical Board

*A comfortable Victorian living room, Mackenzie House.*

# The dining room at Christmas

Toronto Historical Board

National Archives of Canada

*William Lyon Mackenzie King communes with his mother, Isabel Grace, a daughter of William Lyon Mackenzie. Mackenzie King's interest in spiritualism may have given rise to the reports of hauntings at Mackenzie House.*

carefully examines each supposed supernatural occurrence and provides convincingly natural explanations, some from his knowledge of human psychology, some from his personal investigations at the house. He demonstrated, for example, that sounds in the building next door are transferred into the house. One such sound which might have been thought to be a ghost was the automatic flushing of the building's men's room urinals.

The reports of hauntings may thus not convince everyone of a life after death. Nevertheless the stories do contain evidence of life in the nineteenth century. For all their fantasy, the tales reveal some facts about Mackenzie's Victorian world.

*"These are private things . . ."* Mackenzie House was carefully restored in 1961-1962 to make the house expressive of typical middle class living in Toronto in 1860. Historical consultants were employed to make sure that its furnishings are correct for the year Mackenzie died, 1861. Few of them, however, actually belonged to the Mackenzies. The spirit of a family member returning today would specifically recognize very little.

*The piano was playing. It wasn't a tune . . .* It is known that members of the Mackenzie family were musically talented. In the Mackenzie papers at the Public Archives of Ontario are several account books for *Mackenzie's Weekly Message,* the newspaper he published during his later Toronto years. Pasted in them, along with receipts and correspondence relating to the paper, are a few personal family bills. One dated 1858, just a year before they moved to Bond Street, is for £6 for the rental of a piano (not the small spinet at the house today), from J.A.Y.S. Nordheimer of 14 King Street E. Isabel Grace, the youngest daughter — she lived in the house for more than a decade — was later famous as the mother of William Lyon Mackenzie King, who remembered her to have been very musical. Were her (or her mother's) ghost to play a piano today, the sounds would more likely be pleasant tunes than the reported odd bangings.

*"The toilet flushed by itself at times."* The house, as noted, was carefully restored by the Toronto Historical Board to be as it was in 1860. It has gas lights, but no running water. In Mackenzie's time it had no toilet. There were "water closets" in Canada by that time, but the lack of a proper sewer system would probably have prevented one being installed in a row house in urban Toronto. One may well wonder whether Mackenzie ever flushed a toilet in his life.

*"A short, frock-coated man . . . has been seen."* Mackenzie was often referred to as short. Sir Francis

National Archives of Canada

*Sir Francis Bond Head was not impressed by Mackenzie. "The tiny creature raved in all directions," he wrote after their meeting.*

Bond Head, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada at the time of the 1837 Rebellion, described his first meeting with Mackenzie: "Afraid to look me in the face, he sat, his feet not reaching to the ground . . . the tiny creature raved in all directions". Mackenzie's biographer and son-in-law Charles Lindsey described him as "of slight build and scarcely of medium height, being only five feet six inches in stature." The *Weekly Message* accounts already referred to also include a bill dated 1 January 1858 from J. Laidlaw & Co. of Toronto for a "superfine B Beaver Dress Frock Coat - £6."

*"The man . . . was completely bald with side whiskers"*. According to Lindsey, when Mackenzie came to Canada in 1820, he was "already bald from the effects of a fever". Francis Collins, editor of a competing newspaper, the *Canadian Freeman*, reported that Mackenzie in 1827 had purchased "the celebrated . . . wig which now covers his little knavish pate". Collins dubbed Mackenzie "the Knight of the Red Wig" and noted on his 1833 return to Canada after a lengthy stay in England, that Mackenzie had changed his wig "for a new one, in Bashaw fashion, with two tails". In the National Archives of Canada there is a photograph of Mackenzie much later in life — it shows him with thin hair, side whiskers and a beard, but not bald.

*"A woman, long hair hanging around her shoulders, has appeared . . . "* At the house hangs the only known picture of Isabel Baxter Mackenzie, painted in 1834 at the time Mackenzie was serving as Toronto's first mayor. She wears a bonnet, so the length of her hair is not shown. Lindsey's biography of Mackenzie has no description of his wife — it does describe his mother:

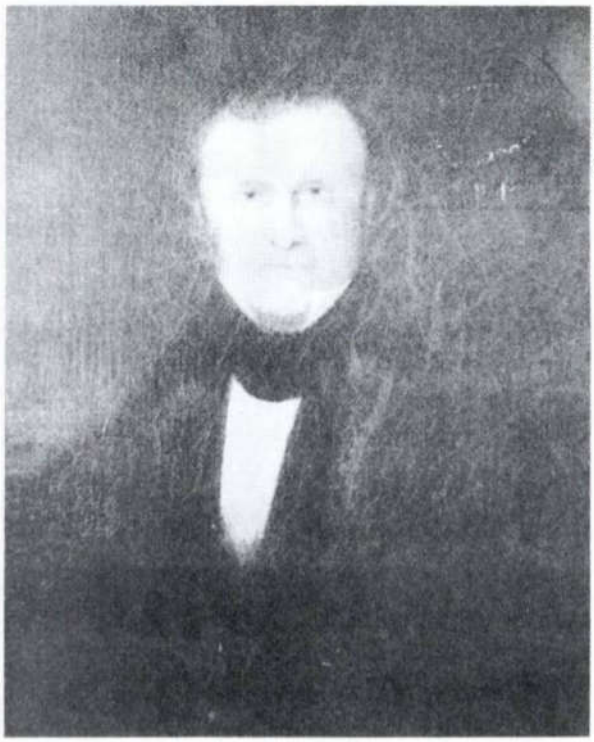
*William Lyon Mackenzie in later life.*

"Her hair was dark-brown, till whitened by age, and at ninety it was as abundant as ever, and always long." She died at Rochester, New York, in 1839, long before Mackenzie House was built.

*"He saw, dangling over the stairway, a rope knotted in the form of a hangman's noose."* Mackenzie was

Royal Ontario Museum

*Mackenzie's Toronto, from the "Illustrated London News", 1847. The drawing depicts King Street East between Yonge and Church.*



Toronto Historical Board

*Isabel Baxter Mackenzie and William Lyon Mackenzie, painted by an anonymous artist in 1834. Both paintings are on view at Mackenzie House.*

the only member of the family to die in the house, and he died of natural causes. Two of his closest associates in the rebellion, Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, were publicly hanged in 1838 for treason. In 1859, shortly after he occupied the Bond Street house, Mackenzie accompanied Mrs. Lount at the reburial of Lount and Matthews at the Toronto Necropolis cemetery. Mackenzie himself was buried there two years later.

*"The printing press in the basement . . . I heard it . . . a rumbling clanking noise . . ."* The press at Mackenzie House is a "Washington" press made by R. Hoe of New York. Correspondence preserved at the Ontario Archives shows that Mackenzie apparently bought such a press in 1853 when he purchased printing equipment for his *Weekly Message*, including the type cabinet also at the house — it has his name and shipping instructions painted on the back. The press is not, however, the one damaged in the famous raid on his office of 1826, despite persistent reports otherwise. At the time of the reported hauntings, the press was locked to make it inoperable, but since 1967 it has been the central feature of the museum's demonstration printshop. There are a number of Washington presses at museums and pioneer villages in this country. A visit to any of them will show that such flat-bed presses are worked by cranking them in and out again — they start and stop; they do not "run with a rumbling clanking noise". Although Mackenzie often referred to himself as a "printer," he probably never operated his presses himself — his role was editor, publisher, manager. Indeed, he often complained that he was slave to his journeymen printers on whose skills he had constantly to depend.

Such tales as these show that reported hauntings may continue to hold our interest, but real history is more than equally captivating. Museums like Mackenzie House, libraries and archives are filled with factual evidence, not of the supernatural world, but of the world before now. The ghost of Mackenzie may not inhabit his house, but his spirit and the spirit of his times can still be found there. ♦

---

*Chris Raible is a Toronto writer, teacher and historical interpreter.*

# THE STAR FROM HAMILTON

By Cheryl MacDonald

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath . . ." The audience in Hamilton's Grand Opera House listened raptly to Ida Lewis's rendition of Portia's famous lines. True, the more critical among them felt she overplayed the part, but this was, after all, an amateur production, a benefit for retiring Shakespearean actor John Townsend. And Miss Lewis was very young. She was also very beautiful, and her contralto voice was a pleasure to hear — even if she did tend to rush her lines somewhat.

The next day, 4 April 1884, the *Hamilton Spectator* singled out the attractive young actress for special attention. Although the *Spectator* critic erroneously noted that Miss Lewis was only 11 years of age (she was, in fact, a month short of her 15th birthday), his observations on her acting ability were closer to the mark: "Miss Ida Lewis as Portia showed real talent, and would certainly, if properly trained, make a creditable actress."

If anyone disagreed with the prophesy, Ida Lewis was not among them. Daughter of a Welsh cigar maker and an amateur Shakespearean reader, acting was in her blood. She was born 3 May 1869 in Hamilton, Ontario, and almost from the time she could talk she was memorizing parts of Shakespeare and other plays, which she would then recite to her collection of dolls, using appropriate dramatic gestures. Both her parents encouraged her interest, so that by the time of the Townsend benefit she was beginning to gain a reputation for her acting ability as well as her dark good looks.

Young Ida, however, wanted more than a reputation as a talented amateur. Again, her parents supported her ambitions. Several months after Ida's appearance as Portia, a professional dramatic company under the direction of German actor-manager Daniel Bandmann visited Hamilton. With her father as chaperon, she obtained a brief interview with Bandmann, who agreed to allow her to accompany his troupe. There were some conditions, of course, including the stipulation that she would not be paid until Bandmann was satisfied with her work.

Ida eagerly agreed. For the next few years she toured with Bandmann, appearing as old women, young men, and, eventually in female leads. Bandmann was not always the easiest person to work for — even after good reviews in Cincinnati, Ida's salary was only $10 a week. And, on one occasion, he became so exasperated with the young woman that he choked her and locked her in her dressing room.

Nevertheless, Ida learned a great deal, both through performances which included an appearance in New York City at the Third Avenue Theatre, and during a year of dramatic and musical study in England and Germany. By 1887, however, she was ready to leave Bandmann's company and join another theatrical troupe under the direction of Kate Forsyth.

Ida not only changed her colleagues around this time, she also changed her name. In February 1891, she returned to New York City as Julia Arthur, the name by which she would be known for the rest of her life.

Whether it was the change of name, her accumulated experience, or sheer luck, the next few years brought her increasing fame and fortune. Her role as Queen Fortunetta in *The Black Masque* caught the

*Sir Henry Irving dressed for the role of Shylock.*

attention of theatrical impresario A. M. Palmer, who promptly offered her a position with his stock company. Here, she not only recreated her role in *The Black Masque,* but also portrayed Jeanne Tourenie in *The Broken Seal,* Letty Fletcher in *Saints and Sinners,* and the lead role in Oscar Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan.*

Melodrama was the staple of the popular theatre in the closing decade of the nineteenth century, and Julia Arthur was well on her way to becoming one of its brightest stars. Her appearance was greatly in her favour. At five foot, four and a half inches, she was slightly taller than average, "long in limb and sinuously supple," with dark hair and dark, expressive eyes which one reporter described as "the sort of eyes that stir mankind to a great many fine things and sometimes a great many foolish things, too". She also had a melodious contralto voice and considerable sex appeal — though it was not then called that — which made her ideal for exotic, passionate parts.

Typical of these was the lead role in *Mercedes* in which Julia played a young Spanish girl at the time of the Napoleonic wars who poisons wine meant for French soldiers, then drinks it to prove it is untainted. Palmer mounted the production chiefly as a vehicle for Julia's talents and beauty, and it was well received by critics and audiences alike. But it also marked the end of Julia's relationship with Palmer. When the company was on tour in the spring of 1894, Palmer assigned her a berth in the sleeping car, instead of the private car she felt she deserved, and Julia abruptly ended her association with his company.

Up to that time, contemporary newspaper stories stressed Julia's quiet, studious life. She lived on 23rd Street in New York with a younger sister, who acted under the name Mary Martin, and spent little time on pleasure, preferring to concentrate on reading and learning her craft. Some reporters remarked on her unassuming manner and the absence of theatricality in her speech and gestures when offstage. "She is a serious, studious, intelligent young woman, greatly interested in her work, and with vast amounts of ambition," wrote one. Others, however, were only too happy to report her growing imperiousness, especially after she decided to leave the United States for Britain.

"JULIA IN A HUFF" reported the *Hamilton Spectator* on 13 October 1894, reproducing an article from a New York newspaper which quoted Julia's complaints that English actresses automatically received more respect and critical acclaim than their North American counterparts:

> I am sick and tired of being called "a promising young actress" . . . . Let a native actress have never [*sic*] so much talent or genius and she must struggle against obstacles innumerable . . . . To the young, ambitious, earnest American actress, applies with special force the Biblical statement that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country. I know that a higher standard of judgement and criticism prevails in England than here, but I am going to London in sheer desperation — discouraged, hopeless of ever finding a way to advancement in my own land unless I am able to return with a foreign stamp of approval.

Later, Julia would say the reports were gravely exaggerated. Whatever the truth of that statement, she did leave for England, and, with relatively little difficulty, obtained a position with Henry Irving's company.

The best known of the Victorian actor-managers, Henry Irving was famous for his high standards and lavish productions, most of which starred Ellen Terry as the female lead. By this time, however, Miss Terry was increasingly content to rest on her laurels. So there may have been more than a grain of truth in Julia's statement to Hamilton critic Hector Charlesworth. "She laughingly told me that she soon learned she had been engaged 'to make Ellen Terry act.' "

To do so required a certain amount of acting on Julia's part. She made her London debut at the Lyceum

Theatre as Rosamund in *Becket*, appropriately enough on Dominion Day 1895. Roles in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Corsican Brothers* followed. Although many of the parts she played were identified with Ellen Terry, most critics kindly refrained from drawing comparisons between the ingenue and the doyenne.

Like Irving, they were probably pleasantly surprised at Julia's manner of speech. As she told one reporter:

> When I first joined the company I was afraid that my American accent, which I know is marked, would arouse comment, and indeed Sir Henry was afraid so, too. But after the first rehearsal he came to me with a delighted smile, "Where is your accent?" he said. I looked at him wonderingly. "You have it in private life", he went on, "but it disappears on the stage". And from that time to the day I left him, he never mentioned accent again.

Between 1895 and 1897, Irving's company made two tours of Canada and the United States. Julia's association with the troupe justified her sudden departure for England: she was now hailed as "the Sarah Bernhardt of the American stage." Presumably, the North American stage was meant, for Julia was always popular in Canada, especially in her hometown of Hamilton, which she visited whenever she could. By the end of the second tour, convinced artistic and economic security were now possible in the U.S., and undoubtedly missing her parents and 13 brothers and sisters, she returned to North America to stay.

On 4 October 1897, Julia appeared in *A Lady of Quality* in Chicago. Written by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the author of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, the melodrama was well suited to Julia's talents. In fact, Mrs. Burnett, who had consulted with Julia about scenery, costumes and her interpretation of the female lead, told reporters Julia Arthur was the "perfect Clorinda". Although the author would later reverse that judgement, criticizing Julia's performance and suing her for royalties, audiences apparently agreed. Whether masquerading as a boy to join in the hunt, or dressed in a scarlet and black riding habit and a large Gainsborough hat, "Julia Arthur was a ravishing figure".

Julia's triumph was short-lived. Three days later, during her Detroit engagement, a fire swept through the city's downtown business section, destroying several buildings, including the Opera House where Julia's costumes and sets were stored. According to her brother and manager, Arthur Lewis, most of the $25,000 loss was insured, and he had already ordered replacements, which, he was confident, would be ready by 1 November.

Arthur was right. On 1 November, right on schedule, *A Lady of Quality* opened at Wallack's Theatre in New York City. Subsequently, Julia played to audiences throughout the United States and Canada, thrilling them with her passionate interpretation of the Clorinda Wildairs role and her exotic beauty.

*Ellen Terry as Shakespeare's Ophelia.*

While stagestruck admirers sent the actress flowers, gifts and billets-doux, Julia was involved in a love affair of her own. Sometime earlier, her brother had introduced her to Benjamin Pierce Cheney, Jr., son of the founder of the American Express Company. Cheney was a Harvard graduate with an avid interest in the theatre. He was one of the star performers of the Boston Cadets dramatic group, specializing in musical comedy. "He can get more fun from half a dozen unimportant words than most of the world can from an entire file of comic magazines," noted an article in the *Boston Home Journal*, which went on to describe him as a popular and good-natured young man. "He doesn't talk a vast deal, but when he says anything it is in a manner to impress the hearer." Equally impressive was his wealth. Following his father's death in July 1895, he had taken his place on numerous boards of directors, and by 1898 was valued at more than $10 million.

The combination of a vast fortune and theatrical leanings naturally brought Ben Cheney into contact with actresses and producers. He served as theatrical "angel" for financially troubled stage productions, including, apparently, *More Than Queen*. He was also romantically linked with at least one other actress, Florence Crosby, to whom he may have been engaged.

*Julia Arthur, brimming with "soul", strikes a characteristic pose.*

But it was Julia Arthur whom Cheney married. The ceremony took place at Covington, Kentucky on 23 February 1898, and was a secret one, possibly because the bridegroom knew the repercussions it would have in his socially prominent family. In any event, it didn't stay a secret long. Little more than six weeks later, on 11 April, an illness forced Julia to cancel a performance in Boston. Her husband sent for the city's most prominent physicians, and the secret was out.

The beautiful actress's marriage to the wealthy Bostonian resulted in considerable publicity, and neither Julia nor her husband was reluctant to capitalize on it. When she returned to the stage that fall, she and Benjamin were already planning an ambitious season for 1899. Julia would appear in the first English language production of *More Than Queen*, based on the life of Josephine Bonaparte.

Before the first rehearsals took place, the play was making headlines. Newspaper stories emphasized the resemblance between Julia and existing portraits of the Empress Josephine; they also focused on the cost of the production, which featured five railroad cars of scenery, lavish costumes and jewels, said to cost more than $50,000.

As it turned out, these proved more interesting than the performance. One critic called *More Than Queen*, "A pageant rather than a play. It is talky and somewhat tedious in dialogue. The dramatic situations are not spontaneous, but the setting is so spectacular that one almost forgets construction."

The play opened at the Broadway Theatre on 24 September. Before the novelty of the sumptuous sets and gorgeous costumes wore off, Julia found herself in the middle of a highly-publicized controversy.

The incident which set it off occurred at a New York performance of *More Than Queen* on the night of 8 November. Throughout the performance, the actors and the audience had been annoyed by the persistent chatter of two couples in one of the boxes. By the fourth act, Julia had had enough. In an unprecedented move, she ordered the curtain rung down and stepped out before it. It was later reported:

> She . . . made an indignant little speech, which, though ladylike in tone, was effective. She said she was extremely sorry that the play should be interrupted, but she was quite sure that the audience were as much annoyed as both she and her company had been by the conduct of certain persons in the house. Everybody in the theatre applauded tremendously, except the occupants of the boxes. The offenders against good manners gathered their wraps and departed. The play then proceeded.

The incident was by no means over. Afterward, she fired her press agent, W. J. Thorold, for issuing a pass to the group. Thorold promptly sued her for $12,000, the salary he would have earned for the remainder of the season. While the ejected spectators also contemplated lawsuits, dramatic critics discussed the propriety of Julia's action in the newspapers. A rumour also spread that Julia had an ulterior motive in her remarking on the noises. One of the women in the box was said to resemble her rival in love Florence Crosby, "a young woman who has been making Miss Arthur's life a burden to her for several months."

Although she was not in the theatre on 8 November, Ben Cheney's former sweetheart was apparently making noise of her own around town, threatening to sue the millionaire for breach of promise, and, according to some sources, threatening violence against either Cheney or Julia or both. Julia was sufficiently concerned to hire a detective as protection. On the night of 25 November, having heard a rumour that Florence Crosby planned to create a disturbance during Julia's

*Julia Arthur in the role of Hamlet.*

performance, Detective Armstrong and the theatre management refused to admit her. She promptly threatened to sue Cheney and the theatre for "the injury to my character and the extreme mental anguish which I suffered."

Julia's health had been poor for some time. Soon after the Crosby incident, she fell and hurt her back, and then developed a severe cold. Although she attempted to finish the season, appearing in *Romeo and Juliet* in Boston and Chicago, by mid-March the strain was unbearable, and, on doctor's advice, she retired.

Benjamin Cheney issued an official statement to the press, explaining that his wife had been ill for some time, but suggesting her absence might not be permanent. "If in the future she has the desire to re-enter her professional career I shall have no objection, though I shall only consent to short seasons of ten weeks or so."

Illness may have forced Julia off the stage, but she was not out of the spotlight. She had been too popular, and her husband was too prominent, for the press to let her slip into obscurity. The occasional mention in society columns was not enough. Over the next several years, Julia's name frequently made headlines.

One story carried by most major newspapers in North America, as well as by several in France and England, focused on Ben Cheney's gift to his wife for Christmas 1901. He had always been generous to Julia, so much so that she once told a reporter, "I've gotten so that I'm almost afraid to admire anything, for Mr. Cheney is not satisfied if he hears me praise anything until he buys it for me." Consequently, she had an enviable collection of jewels that was made even more prestigious with the addition of the Brunswick stone. The Christmas gift, with the Hope diamond and another smaller stone, had once been part of the famous Tavernier diamond. Now, weighing just under 11 carats and worth $190,000 "the second largest blue diamond in the world" belonged to Julia Arthur.

The gift was only one indication of the Cheneys' luxurious lifestyle. For part of the year, they lived in a suite at the Parker House Hotel, where they frequently entertained friends. Several months were spent in Benjamin's private railway car, crossing the continent to attend to railroad business. And, after 1903, the couple spent the summer months at "The Moorings", their sumptuous estate on a ten-acre island beyond Boston harbour.

All their wealth could not prevent several near disasters — and these, too, were covered in the newspapers.

*Julia Arthur in a range of dramatic roles, including Lady Anne in Shakespeare's Richard III (above). Pictures of Julia Arthur are from the Collection of the Hamilton Public Library.*

In January 1913, horses drawing the sleigh in which Benjamin and Julia were riding suddenly bolted and nearly crashed into a streetcar before tipping over. Julia was thrown out of the sleigh and was badly bruised, but escaped serious injury. Six months later, she underwent an appendectomy, a serious operation at the time. And in the summer of 1912, when Julia and several women were aboard the Cheney yacht, someone on shore fired a rifle, critically injuring the captain. Fortunately, Julia had some sailing experience, and brought the vessel safely to harbour.

Perhaps the most difficult experience for the retired actress and her husband was the sudden reversal of their fortunes. While friends whispered that the legendary Hope diamond curse obviously applied to the Brunswick stone as well, the Cheneys auctioned off the furnishings in their summer home, cut back on expenses, and prepared for Julia's return to the stage.

Her first professional appearance in 15 years took place on 25 October 1914, as The Woman in *The Eternal Magdalene* at the Academy of Music in Baltimore. Over the next few years, while World War I raged in Europe, she combined Red Cross work with acting, appearing in *Seremonda, Liberty Aflame,* and *Out There.* In 1918 she also took a brief fling at a career in silent films, appearing in *The Common Cause* and *The Woman the Germans Shot,* the story of British nurse Edith Cavell. The results were discouraging, and Julia turned her attention to Shakespearean drama.

Her last role was her most triumphant. In 1924, she toured as Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan,* a role for which she drew considerable acclaim, especially in her home town. The *Hamilton Spectator* lauded her beauty, brains, powerful and melodious voice, and most of all, her sincerity. And, recalling the performance in his memoirs, Hector Charlesworth wrote:

> I shall never forget my surprise when she walked on the stage, an agile, vigorous girl, apparently no more than 20, handling Shaw's speeches with humour, ease and impassioned beauty. It was her last and greatest performance. She was then about fifty-five, but "full of beans." . . . Her bodily fitness, as well as smart work by the electricians with lights, were the secret of her magic illusion of youthfulness on the stage.

Julia played *Saint Joan* throughout North America. When the tour ended, she returned to private life. She died in Boston in 1950, at the age of eighty.

Few Canadians recognize Julia Arthur's name today. Her career as a star was too brief, too frequently interrupted, and ultimately eclipsed by younger Canadian actresses, including May Irwin and Mary Pickford. For a time, however, she was the darling of North American drama lovers, compared to Bernhardt and Duse, proof that a Hamilton girl with looks, talent, ambition and discipline could reach the top of the theatrical world. She deserves to be remembered. ◆

---

*Cheryl MacDonald is the author of a life of Canadian opera star Emma Albani.*

*Sketch from "Dominion Illustrated", January, 1891.*

# Paddle Wheels on the Prairies

## BY BRUCE WISHART

The rivers of the prairies lie as a tracery over the map. The miles are intercrossed with waterways — some are straight and wide, some crooked and narrow. Some are placid; some treacherous. But they are fertile ribbons, the lifeblood of the prairies.

The Saskatchewan River stretches nearly two thousand miles from the foothills of the Rockies to where it empties into Lake Winnipeg at Grand Rapids, Manitoba. The lake itself holds over 24,000 square kilometres of water — Canada's sixth largest freshwater lake. In the south it is fed by the Red River, which runs nearly 900 kilometres straight north from its birthplace on the borders of Minnesota and South Dakota, and passes through Fargo, Grand Forks, Emerson, Winnipeg and Selkirk in its path. The Assiniboine, in turn, rises in southeastern Saskatchewan and meanders over 1,000 kilometres before joining the Red at Winnipeg.

These are the major waterways of the Canadian prairies. Less than a century ago, they hummed with the activity of the steamboat era.

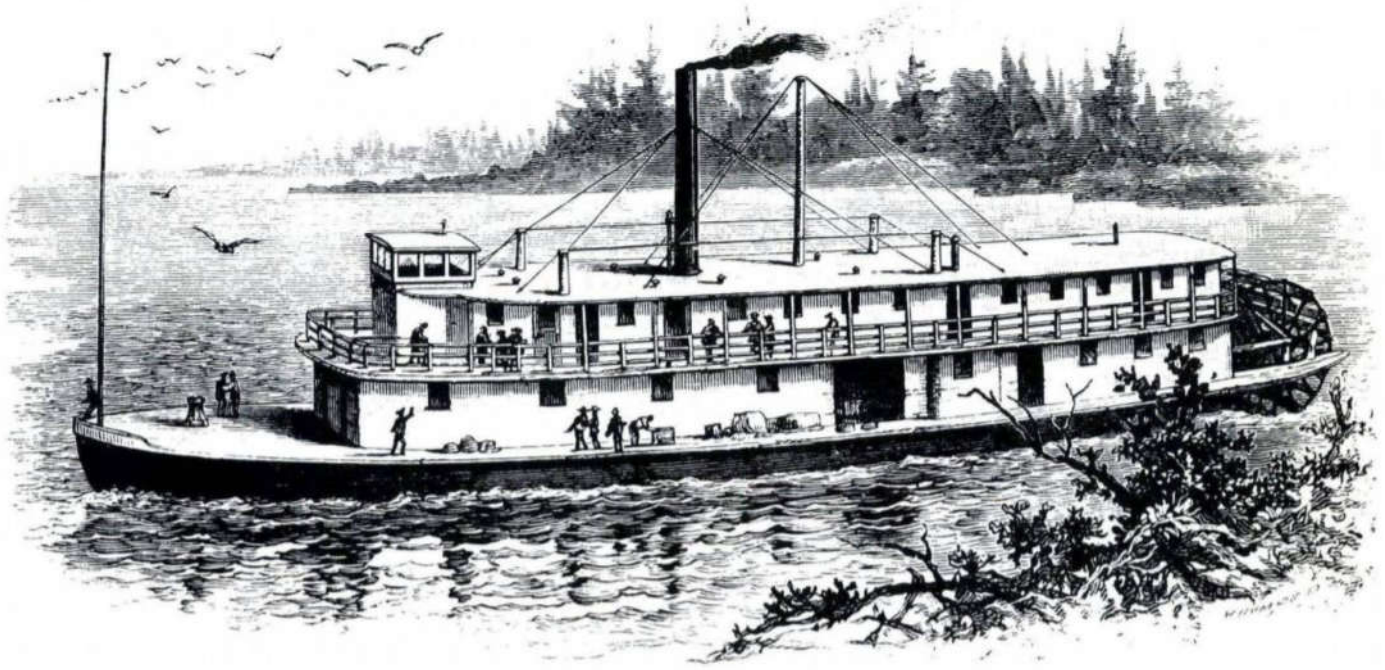
Mississippi skipper Captain Russell Blakely toured the Red River in 1858, and concluded that navigation on it was possible. Encouraged, the Chamber of Commerce of St. Paul, Minnesota, offered a reward of one thousand dollars to the first person to have a steamer operating on the Red. Entrepreneur Anson Northup convinced them to double the reward. The following year he put a revamped Mississippi boat on the Red, and steamed north to the embryonic city of Winnipeg to claim the prize. When the small *Anson Northup* was joined by the *International* in 1862, the steamboat era on the prairies was launched.

In 1874 the S.S. *Dakota* reached Portage la Prairie along the winding Assiniboine, though it took an arduous two-day voyage. In the same year, the *Northcote* reached the Saskatchewan River via the treacherous Grand Rapids. Just one year later the Hudson's Bay Company screw steamer *Colvile* — rebuilt from the failed *Chief Commissioner* — was launched for the Lake Winnipeg trade. The steamer industry expanded quickly.

The Assiniboine held a particular fascination for the steamer captains. In 1857, Henry Youle Hind had measured it as fifty feet wide and six feet deep at the mouth of the Souris. Many suspected that it was navigable beyond Portage. It fell to Peter McArthur's *Marquette* to give it a try in 1879. After a hard, nine-day trip, purser A.D. Robinson was able to write in his logbook: "we arrived at Fort Ellice amid loud cheering from the officers stationed at the place, and the blood-curdling yells of the Indians." Then, in 1881, the *Marquette* pushed up the river as far as Fort Pelly. The Assiniboine, such as it was, had been conquered.

By this time, the steamboats had occupied every major waterway from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the eastern fringes of the Manitoba settlements. Steamboat magnate Norman Kittson declared that in 1875 the Red River between Fargo and Winnipeg had carried more freight than the Mississippi between St. Paul and St. Louis.

The paddle wheel era was a whirl of romance. The moaning steam whistle announced the approaching riverboat. Sparks shot skyward and smoke billowed from towering stacks as the steamer appeared, a glittering palace of white on muddy water. It careered along the rivers, warping over rapids on the strength



*"A North Saskatchewan Steamer", an engraving from the Marquis of Lorne's collection.*

of its crew and passengers. And, like all the steamboats, it was piled increasingly higher with freight, immigrants and tourists as line owners fought competition and rapidly approaching obsolescence.

For the few, short months that the rivers were open for navigation, the boats were hives of activity and excitement. Rival steamboat lines warred in competition. It was rumoured to be no accident when Norman Kittson's *International* rammed its rival, the *Manitoba.* At eleven o'clock on the evening of 4 June 1875 the *International's* prow sliced ten feet into the *Manitoba,* just abreast of the stacks. In a minute the *Manitoba's* deck had slipped below water level, and passengers leapt wildly for the *International's* deck or dived into the water and swam for shore.

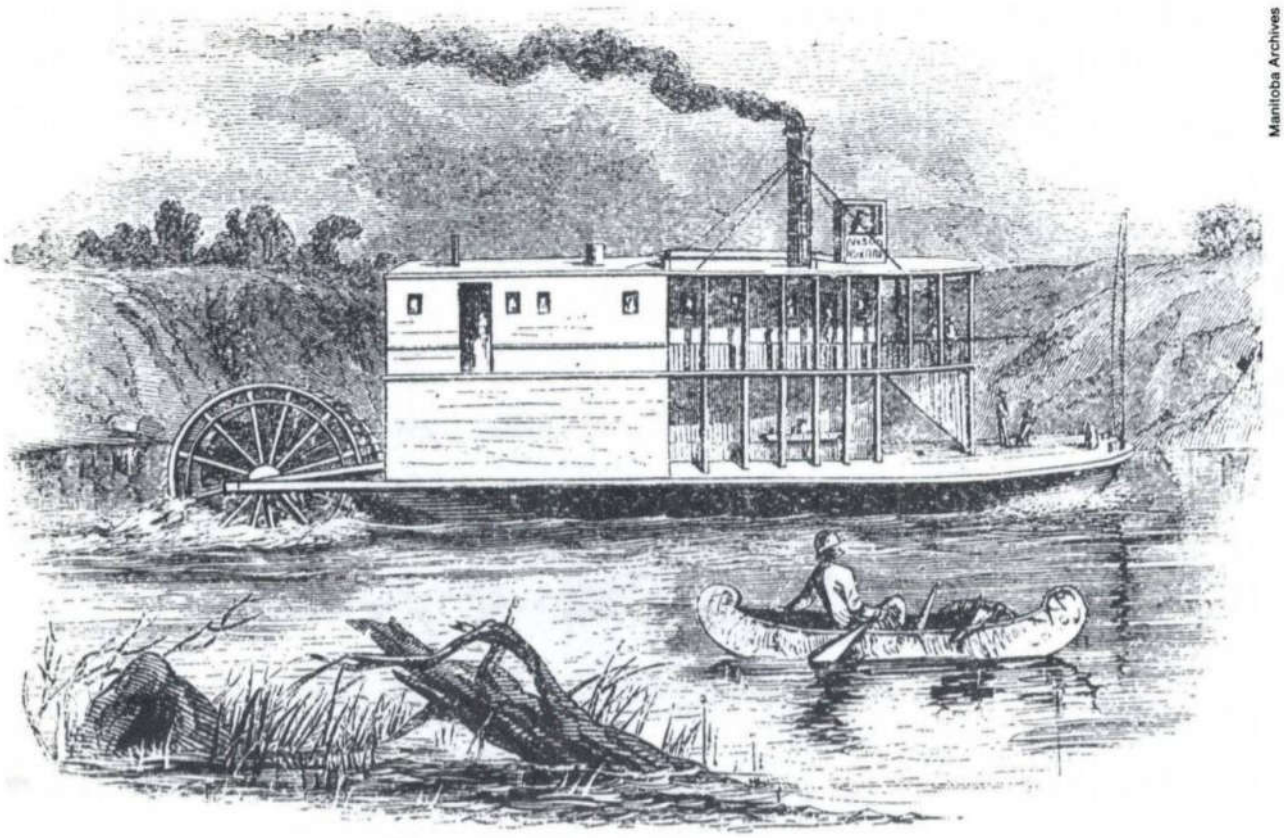
The *Manitoba* was relaunched in six weeks, but she was far from being the only casualty. The *Swallow,* for example, went down in the Red just below Point Douglas in 1878. Famed missionary Father Lacombe was among those who escaped the wreck in a York boat that had been tied alongside.

Some of the losses were spectacular. The *City of Winnipeg* was built as the *Minnesota,* sister of the *Manitoba,* in 1875, and renamed when she took Canadian registry in 1881. It was decided to transfer her to the Saskatchewan trade, but disaster struck as she was being towed north through Lake Winnipeg to Grand Rapids by the *Princess.* In the third storm that battered the two vessels, the *City of Winnipeg* was lost, dashed against the rocks of Long Point.

The wreck of the *Princess* herself was even more spectacular, perhaps the most so of all the prairie marine disasters. In August of 1906 she was southward and homeward bound across Lake Winnipeg, loaded with passengers and freight. She sprang a leak as she passed George Island at 6:30 p.m., but Captain Hawes held her to her course. Gale force winds grew, and soon she fought twenty-five-foot seas. Finally, the captain grimly turned her around in a desperate gamble to reach Swampy Island. There was a great lurch at 4:15 a.m. as a reef punched a hole in her hull. She broke up in minutes. Captain Hawes was one of the six lost.

One of the reasons that wrecks were common lay in the difficulty of the simplest navigation on prairie rivers. Although flood waters could bring treacherous currents, low waters were more the norm — forcing steamer captains to put their crews, and sometimes even their passengers, overboard to push or "warp" the boat over shallow rapids. There is a story that one steamer captain, upon passing a settler who was dipping a pail of water out of the Assiniboine, yelled out: "Hey! You put that water back!" But inland navigation was the original purpose of the steamers. As one old-timer described them, they were boats developed "to carry 400 tons on about three feet of water".

On one boat alone, the adventures could be nonstop. A murder aboard the *International* in 1871 remains unsolved today. From the same boat, a shackled prisoner made a spectacular rescue of a child who had fallen overboard. The *International* was guarded by



Manitoba Archives

*The "Anson Northup", pioneer steamship on the Red.*

the guns of Fort Abercrombie during the 1862 Minnesota uprising, and was later seized and imprisoned by Louis Riel in 1870, (though the steamboats had their revenge when the *Northcote* tackled Batoche as a gunboat in 1885). The *International* also held the honour of being among the few boats to leave the riverbed under her own power. Desperate to get a load of liquor to Fort Garry before a midnight tax hike, Captain Griggs of the *International* took a short cut by jumping the flooded riverbank and going cross-country (a feat repeated when the *Assiniboine,* going to the aid of flood victims, steamed down the main street of Emerson, Manitoba, in 1897).

The captains were part of the steamboats' attraction — they were characters of legend, as often as not, and could be expected to possess at least a few notable oddities. American riverboat folk hero Captain Jerry Webber was "an artist in many and strange oaths". During a party on board his new *Manitoba* in 1875, he gleefully wrapped himself in one of the flags presented to him for breaking the speed record from Minnesota to Winnipeg. His 1879 Assiniboine trips were highlighted by a companion raven with crimson ribbon on its wings.

The boat interiors were luxurious — in her 1881 refitting, for example, the *City of Winnipeg* was given carpets, chandeliers, and a thousand-dollar piano — but the experience itself was the main attraction. The surprises and excitement were nonstop. Passengers frequently tumbled overboard, as was reported by one 1875 *Manitoba Free Press* article. On the promenade "a stranger was trying to waltz across the deck with an umbrella under his arm for a partner". He took a round too many, and, "without trying, waltzed off most beautifully into the river". The erstwhile dancer was recovered, minus the umbrella, a hat and one shoe.

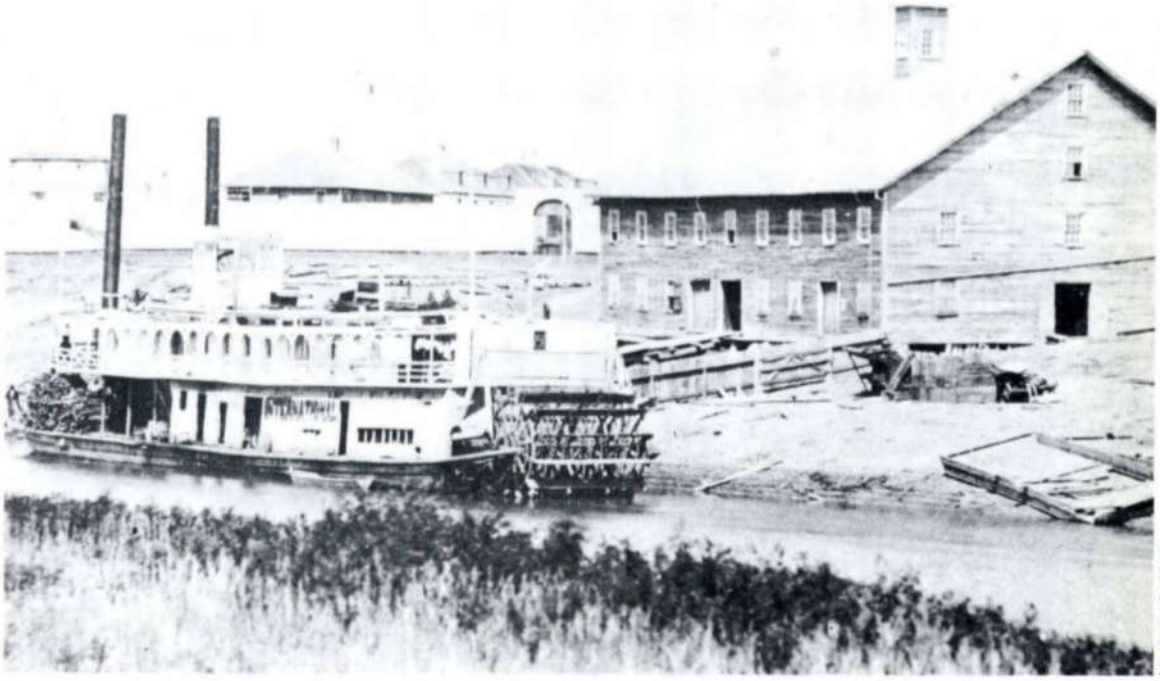
Races between the boats were another attraction. One was a night-time contest between the *Manitoba* and her sister, the *Minnesota.* The lights of the two steamers danced across the waves as they chugged along, and their captains leaned out of the wheelhouses to crack jokes. "But we didn't spill any coal oil into the furnace nor break up the cabin furniture to make steam," a traveller lamented, no doubt remembering the great Mississippi Steamboat Race of 1870 between the *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee.* In the northern version, the *Manitoba* was quietly left behind.

Lady Dufferin, wife of the Governor-General, travelling on the Red aboard the *Minnesota* in 1877, left the most graphic description of riverboat travel on

Manitoba Archives

*The "Assiniboine" on Main Street, Emerson, Manitoba, during the Red River flood of 1897.*

*The "International" unloads goods at the Hudson's Bay Company warehouse, Upper Fort Garry, 1872.*



Manitoba Archives

Manitoba Archives

*The "Manitoba" ready to unload passengers and freight at Winnipeg, 1875.*

Manitoba Archives

*The first CPR locomotive on the prairies, "The Countess of Dufferin", is delivered to Winnipeg, 1877, marking the beginning of the end for steamboat transportation on the prairies.*

HBC Archives

*Steamboat magnate Norman Kittson, a leader in north-south transportation in the 1870s.*

this "very narrow and extremely sinuous" river. "I can only tell you that we go from one bank to the other, crushing and crashing against the trees, which grow down to the waterside; the branches sweep over the deck, and fly in our faces, and leave pieces behind them. I had just written this when I gave a shriek as I saw my ink-bottle on the point of being swept overboard by an intrusive tree; and D's [Lord Dufferin's] hat was knocked off his head by it.

"The consequence of this curious navigation is that we never really go on for more than three minutes at a time; we run against one bank, our steam is shut off, and in some mysterious manner we swing round till our bow is into the other; then we rebound, and go on a few yards, till the sharp curve brings us up against the side. Our stern wheel is very often ashore, and our captain and pilot must require the patience of saints."

The lake trade was different again. Although Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba supported big boats during the Age of Steam, it was Lake Winnipeg that became the centre of steamer traffic. For fish and lumber, and to service the remote northern communities, the steamers challenged Manitoba's great lake. Dozens of boats criss-crossed the lake in the early part of this century.

The heyday of the steamboats ended abruptly. On 8 October 1877, the *Selkirk* arrived at Winnipeg with a barge that carried the first CPR locomotive on the prairies. In doing so, the *Selkirk* ironically signed her own death warrant, and that of the other steamers on the prairies. When the transcontinental link was achieved by the CPR in 1885, the steamer was suddenly outmoded.

They lingered for awhile, of course. Though the railway killed the Saskatchewan trade in the 1890s, tramp steamers continued for years. The last steamboat run from Minnesota to Winnipeg did not take place until 1909, when the *Grand Forks* made the trip, and the Lake Winnipeg trade carried on well into the twentieth century.

Manitoba Archives

*Luxury on the Assiniboine: Passengers sit in the Grand Salon of the "City of Winnipeg" enroute to Fort Ellice, 1881.*

But gradually the old steamers left the scene. The *Anson Northup,* the first on the rivers, was the first to go. She sank in her winter quarters at Cook's Creek, and was rebuilt as the *Pioneer* in 1861. The following year she was crushed by ice, and went permanently to her grave. The *Manitoba,* already sunk once by Kittson's *International,* was buried beneath twenty feet of ice at Prince Albert and shattered just as panic gripped the town over the news of the battle at Duck Lake. The *Northcote* was beached at Cumberland House after the rebellion, where it was torched in about 1909. The *Marquette,* first on the Assiniboine, was wrecked less than ten years later on the Red. Far more were simply beached or scuttled as profits declined. The great prairie fleet vanished.

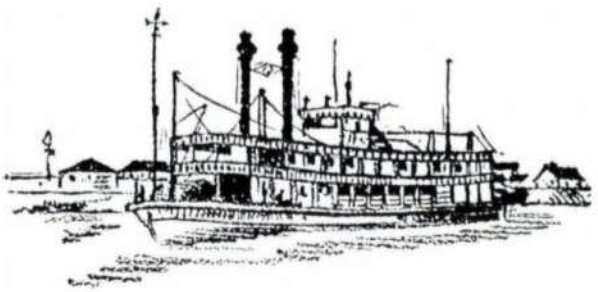
The last was the S.S. *Keenora.* She was prefabricated in Quebec, and assembled at Kenora, Ontario, in 1897 for the Lake of the Woods trade. In 1917 she was cut into sections and shipped to Winnipeg, where she was enlarged and launched on the Red. She hauled freight and passengers on the Red and on Lake Winnipeg. On a week's voyage she would steam north from Selkirk to Hecla, Gull Harbour, Pine Dock, Matheson Island, Berens River, Warren Landing, across the Lake to Grand Rapids and then south by the same route, sometimes stopping at Victoria Beach or Gimli before ending the week by offering Winnipeggers a Sunday cruise on the Red. In 1959 her boilers were broken up for ballast and diesel engines were installed. Finally, in 1966, the *Keenora* was abandoned in the "Selkirk Slough" — once birthplace of steamers, now their burial ground. The steamboat era was over.

On a cold, grey day at the beginning of October, many years later, I visited the Marine Museum in Selkirk, Manitoba. Gulls soared and cried around the ghosts of the past: The M.S. *Lady Canadian,* a fish freighter from the Lake; the *Chickama,* carrier of passengers and freight; the tug boat *Peguis II;* the tall C.G.S. *Bradbury* of 1913, a government icebreaker in grey and orange, used to haul freight and passengers. Towering above them all is the *Keenora,* last of the steamers. Beside her are the shattered remnants of the S.S. *Granite Rock.* These are the sole survivors; surrounded now by lawns instead of waves.

The silence on the river is broken by only the lapping waves and screaming gulls. Occasionally a motorboat whines by. But the lonely howl of the steam whistle no longer rises to challenge the stillness. Barely a memory of the steamboat era lingers. ♦

---

*Historical writer Bruce Wishart lives at Brandon, Manitoba, not far from where the Assiniboine River steamers plied their trade.*



# Roads to Ruin

## A dim view of Canada in the Victorian twilight

By JACK PEACH

In his 50th year, 1897, Arthur Edward Peach was a crusty, opinionated, and prosperous hosiery manufacturer in the English city of Leicester. As the senior member of Peach Brothers and Burland, Arthur had earlier appointed himself the firm's overseas salesman, selecting his birthplace, Toronto, as the Canadian base from which to peddle the wares of his firm. In that salesman role he completed about a dozen trans-Atlantic crossings to his homeland to service a string of wholesalers of his company's hosiery before his death in England in 1904.

On one of his trips in 1873 he had married Emma Goulding, daughter of one of his Toronto customers who was a notable importer of ladies' millinery. For the first few months of their marriage Arthur left his wife at her parents' home on Sherbourne Street, Toronto, while he crossed and re-crossed the Atlantic in busy pursuit of an expanding business that included a re-structuring of the Leicester business partnership.

Emma Peach gave birth to their first son, Harry Hardy, in Toronto in 1875, after which she and the child accompanied her husband to Oadby, on the southeastern outskirts of Leicester, where she lived most of her married life. As Harry grew up in England with his two brothers and two sisters he, as the eldest, received a succession of letters from his constantly travelling father.

Much of the correspondence dealt with Arthur's reactions to Canadian and eastern United States scenes and events he felt would be of particular interest to his Canadian-born son. Yet, from the tone and bias of his letters it appeared the father was almost cautioning the youth against developing a wanderlust that might lure him back to live in the New World.

Arthur Peach flavoured his letters with acerbic comments emerging from his observation and memory for detail. Recounting an experience while visiting his brother-in-law, Will Goulding, he observed:

> I dined at your Uncle Will's yesterday. It is simply a splendid house, furnished magnificently. After dinner we sat smoking in the conservatory. Suddenly a young lady in a sealskin coat with a matching hat descended the stairs carrying a banjo or violin in a case. She went out the back door.
>
> "Will, who is that?" I asked. He replied, "That is only our cook going to the Music College for lessons." This was about three o'clock in the afternoon — and that is the style of living all through. *Too much education!* I think there is such a thing as over-educating people. Here they seem to be educated for everything but work.

Obviously this sparked, between host and guest, a spirited discussion from which Arthur, despite his Canadian roots and frequent visits, emerged with some tart opinions: "The best and smartest young fellows of their farmer families are drawn off to the United States where, in Chicago alone I am told, there are fifty thousand Canadians.

"Another ill is caused by the Canadian farmer. If he has four sons they all have to go through a college education in Toronto or elsewhere (which is not at all expensive). The result is *goodbye to farm work!* The smartest son goes to the United States. The others settle down in Toronto or nearby centres as doctors, lawyers, or storekeepers. But seldom do they return to the farm. It is not genteel. It is too slow. For streets in Toronto it seems that every other house is that of either a doctor or dentist."

The Peach acidity rarely could be side-tracked from the topic of education which, he appeared to feel, was as good a whipping-boy as anything. His impression of Central Canada's growing decadence he laid firmly

on that same doorstep. "With government [in 1897] there are more politics to the square yard in Canada than in an English parish. Here again, enter the *over educated* farmer's sons, so well educated they cannot work for a living, are not a success in the over-crowded professions, and so turn out to be rogues in politics living by their wits.

"When I sailed from Canada 20 years ago, the population was about four million. Today I don't think it comes up to five million. In the first place, the best and smartest young fellows of the finer families are drawn off to the United States. Very soon, they say, there will be more Canadians in the United States than in the Dominion."

"It looks to me that the English capital that has been borrowed by the Canadian Government has been spent on public buildings to harbour a lot of government officials — sons of families of influence. Now, why should it be that here there is a splendid country with vast resources, larger than the United States, with not one-tenth the population? The sum and substance of it is — extravagance."

Arthur Peach was a frugal man, and overly proud of it. Perhaps because he had worked so earnestly to become an Englishman, the state of Canadian countryside wastage distressed him. Yet its beauty warmed him: "At Welland my farmer cousins met me with a two-horse sleigh for our 8-mile ride in the snow. It was the same story everywhere — no money and bad times. The wheat crop failed in this district. They say they did not get the seed back. But the apple crop was enormous. I saw apples on the trees in the snow, never gathered. They have plenty to eat and plenty to drink but no money."

*A horse-drawn omnibus passes the fashionable Queen's Hotel on Front Street West between Bay and York Streets, about 1886.*

Metro Toronto Library

When, months later, he travelled the same route by train, he observed, "From the cars I saw a lovely picture: a country about three miles wide. Lake Ontario, and the land a forest of peach, apple, and pear trees. Underneath were miles of grape vines, small fruits such as currant, raspberry, and so on. Now, I thought, if the rest of Canada was like this it would be wonderful."

He said he was reminded of a conversation he had overheard on a Toronto-bound train during one of his sales trips to the Niagara Peninsula. Two passengers were arguing the merits of parts of the country. "One, obviously not a Toronto man, bragged about Kansas and said, 'If only we had more rain and a little better society, Kansas would be paradise'. A Yankee fellow who I knew well and who lives a few doors from here, was reading his paper and was listening. He looked up and said, 'Look here, Mr. Kansas, whatever your name is, I guess that's all Hell wants — more rain and a little better society, and it would be paradise too!' "

Arthur Peach held Central Canada, socially and commercially, in low esteem, blaming it for the country's slow development. Each of his Canadian trips was brief, for he felt he had to keep in close and frequent personal touch with the firm in England whose welfare so closely affected his own.

Canadian retail trade was in a slump, a condition that exerted considerable pressure on Peach who, although a persuasive salesman, was somewhat of a skeptic and career pessimist: "No one can deny that the Canadians are loyal to England. They are extremely so. Perhaps that is fostered by having a strong Republican neighbour. And it is very nice to have a big brother to call upon if there is anything to be done."

Linking the social incongruities he perceived in Toronto with his theories pertaining to mismanaged government, Peach placed his stamp of disapproval on what he encountered: "There are public buildings in Toronto which are quite the equal of many in London, and the (private) houses are simply splendid. Many are very showy in front but awfully tawdry at back. They may call them Queen Anne fronts but they are Mary Ann behind."

As he travelled about the area he must have met with considerable resistance to his sales pitch even though the hosiery he sold hardly could be regarded as a luxury item. "The competition in the retail trade is something awful," he complained. "I have seen in the shops English goods at prices they cannot be bought

*King Street was Toronto's principal street of business during the 1880s. In this plate from "Picturesque Canada" fashionable Torontonians, horse-trams and carriages throng roads and pavements.*

for in England, and 30 per cent duty and freight have been paid on them at that."

"There's the whole thing in a nutshell — government protection of free trade. As soon as a merchant has made a few thousands, he spends more than half on an elegant house. The result is, that in times like the present, quite half of them have got their behinds stuck in a glue-pot. On Yonge Street I counted over 100 stores to let. It's the same story in St. Catharines. Rows of empty shops, all failed since I was last there. The only way I see open, after watching Canada for 30 years, is to set patriotic sentiment aside, to pack up bag and baggage and to join the United States which country is always legislating against Canadians to drive them into the Union."

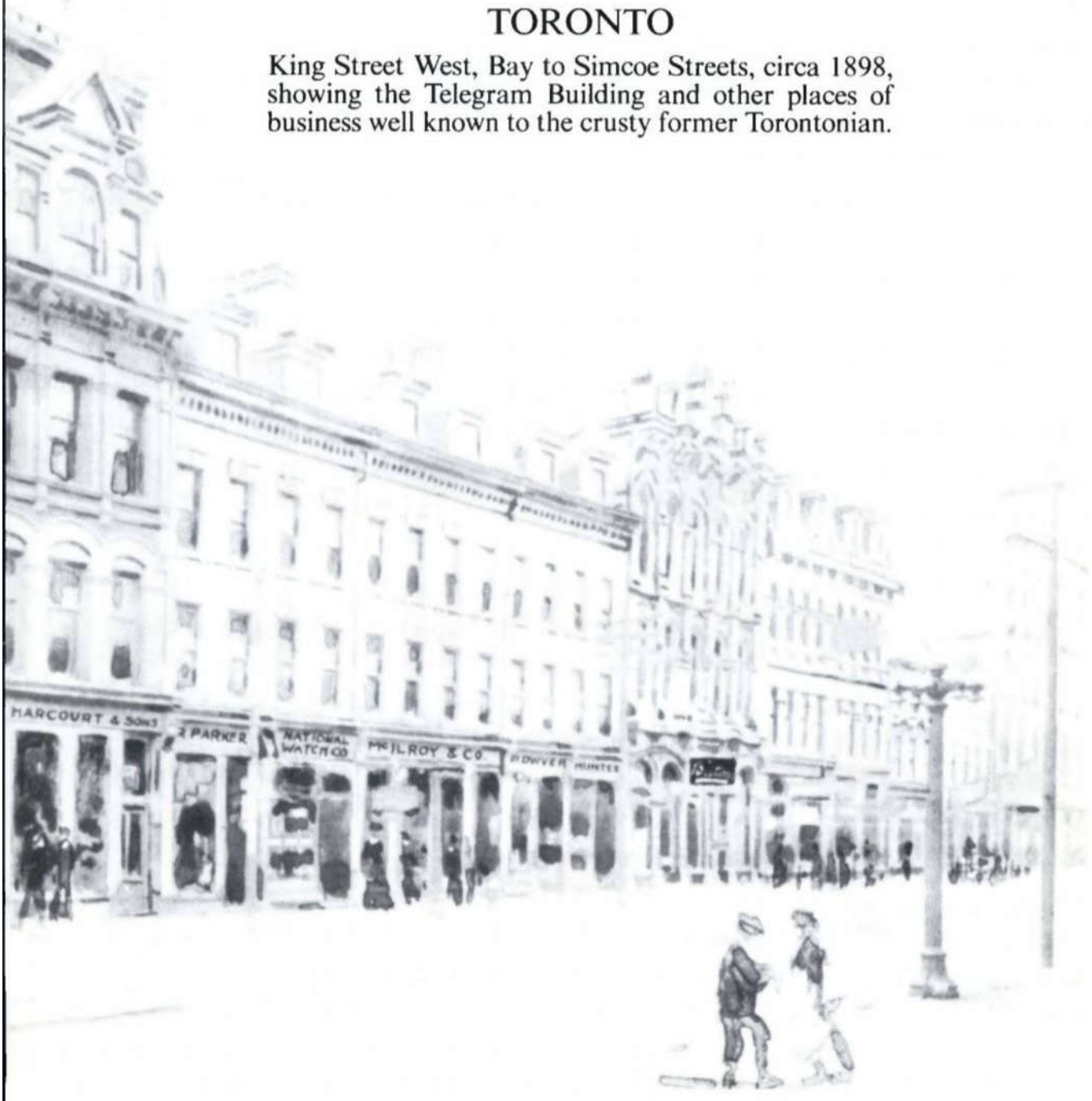
Exhibiting the grip and tenacity of a terrier, Arthur Peach could not stop harrying his birthplace: "Toronto is over-churched. There are churches at nearly every street corner. On the other corners are schools. There seems to be plenty of religion with very little Christianity."

While basking in the glow of the soubriquet "Toronto the Good", the citizens of 1897 found new innocent enjoyment on a skating rink owned by the Goulding family. For a reasonable price whole families enjoyed the centrally-located outdoor recreation spot that

J.H. AMES
& SON
TAILORS
THE EVENING TELEGRAM

# ARTHUR EDWARD PEACH'S TORONTO

King Street West, Bay to Simcoe Streets, circa 1898, showing the Telegram Building and other places of business well known to the crusty former Torontonian.



*"Lights of a City Street" by F.M. Bell-Smith. Queen Street near Yonge in the 1890s.* Simpson's Ltd.

escaped the critical scorn of son-in-law Arthur. "I go down to the Moss Park Skating Rink most nights and it is a lovely sight. There are 1,000 skating there each night. There is no mistake, the Toronto ladies and gentlemen are a splendid type — tall and handsome — and in their fur jackets and hats, with ruddy rosy cheeks, they are perfect pictures.

"There is a band playing and the skaters keep time to the music. It is brilliantly lighted by electric light (it is in the open air,) snow was falling last night . . . ever such a picture. Canadians like to make their pictures complete. Last night there was a large building on fire close by which cast a lurid glare over the scene. A fire is such a common occurrence that I don't think a single person left the rink. The cash receipts for the night was £20. I helped Will count cash."

As an armchair strategist Arthur Peach probably was no less outspoken than others he encountered on this, one of many Canadian visits. "I see in today's papers," he wrote, "they are talking about shutting down the cotton mills near Montreal because they have over-produced. These mills have been fostered by a provincial tariff and have got on well for a time to the benefit of the mill owners. The result is, they can never produce more than the 5 million inhabitants [of Canada] can consume.

"They cannot produce cotton cheap enough to export, so must shut down for a time with the result a great many hands are thrown out of work — winter season too. Now why should it be so? This is a splendid country with splendid resources, larger than the United States, with not one tenth of the population of the States. The sum and substance of it is extravagance, too much education, too much government — being able to borrow money easily in England.

"Instead of careful plodding to develop the resources, there are too many trying to make a living by trading instead of hard work; too many churches *none of which pay a cent of taxes*. There is one resource left which they are looking forward to. That is the gold mining which is now booming in Rossland, British Columbia, and Ontario."

His attitude was a glaring contradiction of thought and act. Writing to son Harry in Leicester who, by now was old enough to handle the many real estate dealings they had flourishing as a sideline, Arthur wrote of a Toronto store window displaying Rossland quartz "showing gold." The promoters were selling shares with one dollar face value for ten cents and fifteen cents, promising to pay dividends based on the face value, not on merely the actual purchase price.

Arthur's brother-in-law Ken Miller of Ontario's Crown Lands Department told wonderful tales ". . . of gold mines being very rich in ore not more than 200 miles from here. I should like to go and see, but the snow is very deep. I have an old friend in the Mines Department of government offices. I shall see him and look into matters."

On a letterhead of G. Goulding & Sons, Wholesale Importers of Millinery and Straw Goods located at No. 55 Bay Street, Toronto, he revealed his preoccupation with the glamorous excitement of mineral development, even by carrying around in his pocket a piece of Rossland quartz. "It is all mines and nothing else talked here now and the wonderful prospects for next summer."

Ken Miller also wanted to know if Arthur was interested in speculating in land. He was in a position to accept offers on an estate 80 miles down the St. Lawrence from Quebec City, completely covered with pine and spruce timber. The 86,000 acres were just being tapped for paper-making. This appealing tract had 15 miles of river frontage including a good harbour, and a salmon river linking a large lake with the St. Lawrence.

Shrewd though he may have thought himself to be, Arthur Peach lacked that degree of derring-do in this promising new resource field. It was only between 1885 and 1890 that the word "pulpwood" had entered our North American language. The pulpwood potential of vast Canadian forest lands was a new, and by no means well recognized, dimension in the nation's resource pattern.

Owners of the forested property had set a price, but Miller thought he could pick it up for much less. "It should come about one shilling per acre," wrote Arthur. "I have a three month option. It is absolutely freehold; no other charges and the local taxes are about £10 a year on the lot. Plenty of deer shooting. It looks like a sporting lot. I am writing to C.H. Payne about the pulp business. He is up in Algoma, Ontario. I will ask him what he thinks of eighty-six thousand acres of slab wood!" There is no mention of it again in subsequent letters, so obviously he did not grasp the opportunity, even though Payne had written to say he was speculating in spruce for pulp because ". . .all the newspapers are now made out of it."

Before leaving for Britain by way of New York, Arthur took another swipe: "I am very disappointed in Toronto, trade is bad and everybody is *over-housed*. Will's house is a lovely place but must be very costly to keep up. The snow is coming down and drifting many feet deep as dry as dust. But the house is at 65 degrees of heat in *every room*."

By May 1900, the two Peach men had changed locales. Arthur had settled down at Highcroft, his brick family mansion in Oadby and son Harry was visiting Toronto. Typically, the old man could not resist a dig at their birthplace. Having earlier complained of its over-heated houses in winter, he had a new complaint: "I hope your cold is better. There always is a danger in those *cold churches* they call houses when the weather is hot. Yours sincerely, Father." ♦

---

*Writer Jack Peach, who lives in Okotoks, Alberta, is a grandson of Arthur Edward Peach.*

*A bird's eye view of Toronto in the early 1890s, looking from the harbour north to Bloor Street and from the Humber River on the west to Victoria Park Avenue in the east.*

Metro Toronto Library

# Along the Old Frontier

## By J. M. Bumsted

**THE SOD-HOUSE FRONTIER 1854-1890**
**A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas and Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas**

By Everett Dick. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1989. 550 pp., illus. $40.00.

A few years ago I managed to force one of my classes to sit still long enough to watch on videotape that great classic of the Golden Age of Hollywood, *The Maltese Falcon,* with Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre. They indulged me with great restlessness, and when the film was over commented in chorus that it was "nothing but one tired old cliché after another." Ah, I responded, "but this movie *invented* most of those clichés." While the informed reader may have much the same reaction as my students to the latest reprint of Everett Dick's pioneer social history, first published in 1937 and now over fifty years old, Professor Dick was equally original. *The Sod-House Frontier* went through three printings in its first edition, then was reprinted in 1954 and again most recently by the University of Nebraska Press. Few works of American history have had such a vitality.

The defects of Dick's approach from the standpoint of modern notions of social history are fairly obvious, both methodologically and conceptually. The book is almost entirely anecdotal, and worse still, written in a style that suggests the universal applicability of the story being told. One doubts that every pioneer doctor had an office "equipped with a bell of peculiar tone" which when rung by the doctor's wife could be "heard all over the settlement" (p. 441 of this edition). But Dick uses the story without qualification as a general rule of the time. Some of his less credible tales may have sometime happened, but scarcely frequently. Perhaps some sod-house children did run about barefoot even in the winter, for example, but not very often and never at 30 below. Dick relied heavily on local histories and what was obviously a personal sense of the region and period no doubt acquired from his parents, early Kansas pioneers to whom the book was dedicated. Many of Dick's central themes were essentially a universalization of the experience of his own family, one suspects, which accounts for many of the limitations of the book often remarked upon in more recent historiographies of the American West.

*The Sod-House Frontier* has more than its fair share of limitations, reflecting the mythology that the people Dick was writing about had created for themselves. It is about WASP migrants almost exclusively, virtually ignoring the large number of ethnic pioneers, particularly in the Dakotas. It conventionally stereotypes minority groups, particularly Indians (those "redskins"), blacks (the "darkies"), and women (long-suffering "drudges" and "brave pioneer mothers"). The sod-house frontier was man's country, where violence and the use of force were common and frequently justified by primitive conditions. Dick's ambivalence about vigilantism is one of the most palpable themes throughout the book. He knows the dangers of taking the law into one's own hands, describing a number of abuses resulting from the absence of due process, but obviously regards such action as functional and justifiable.

At the same time that it is easy to criticize Dick's version of Western settlement, the steady and continued popularity of the work over a period of more than fifty years suggests that he must have been doing something right. What that something right was is as unmistakable as the author's love/hate relationship with Judge Lynch. Indeed, such ambivalence was a strong part of Dick's appeal. What Everett Dick succeeded in doing some fifty years ago was to legitimize the WASP settlers' own version of their hardships and ultimate triumphs, by synthesizing available scholarship and writing on the subject. He gave academic credibility to a certain version of Western prairie history. That interpretation was and still is very powerful in Western historiography on both sides of the border, although there are understandably some differences between the Canadian and American variety. It has its origins in contemporary literature at the time of settlement and continues in the local histories produced by small communities throughout the West.

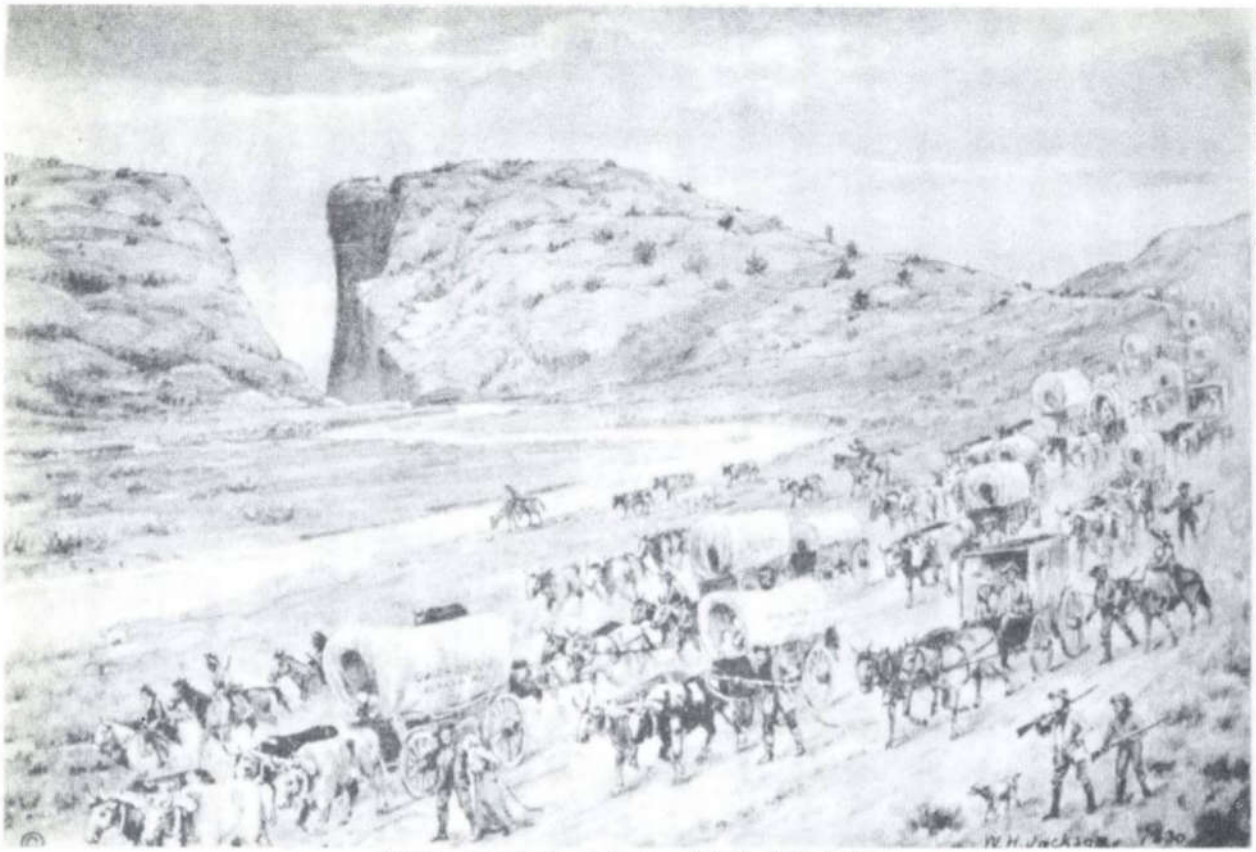
Local history right across North America has always been produced by the "stayers". Transcending region and even nation, there is a sort of formulistic uniformity to most local history, particularly that produced — as so much of it has been in recent years — in committee. Emphasis is on communal

*Sod houses, northern Montana, 1884.*

harmony and progress, the latter highlighted by comparing the present relative ease of life with the suffering and hardships of the first settlers. Most small communities in North America can hardly celebrate success in the traditional sense, since they themselves have been losing in population and witnessing the total erosion of the values that they and their ancestors have sought to promulgate. Hence they tend to contrast the struggles of the early days with the contemporary situation to heighten the sense of progress. Almost every North American local history ever written has had as a major theme the battle for survival, which on one level makes a nonsense out of any notion that certain ethnic groups or national citizens have a monopoly on the survival motif. If survival is a common feature of community history across the continent, the particulars of the conflict vary considerably from region to region. Not surviving *per se,* but the nature of the struggle (often mythological) is what is different from place to place.

Not only geographical location but the period of chronicling produce quite variable specifics. Earlier accounts are more likely to emphasize conflict than later ones, for example. In any case, local/community histories have seldom been taken very seriously by academic historians, either as a source of data or as a guide to mythology, and their very regionalized nature tends to make it difficult to see them as a continental phenomenon. [For further details, see, for example: Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Community Studies, Urban History, and American Local History," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us; Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY, 1980); Seena B. Kohl, "Image and Behaviour: Women's Participation in North American Family Agricultural Enterprises," in Wava G. Haney and Jane B. Knowles, ed., *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures* (Boulder, Colorado and London, England, 1988), 89–108; Paul Voisey, "Rural Local History and the Prairie West," *Prairie Forum* 10:2 (1985), 327-38; Barbara Oliver et al., *Regional Heritage Project: a Content Analysis of Selected Local Histories in Saskatchewan* (Regina, 1984).] However much community histories literally cry out for some serious study of their own, what is important for our present purposes is that Everett Dick relied on them heavily for his study of the settlement of the north-central American prairie.

*The Sod-House Frontier* synthesizes, as it were, several earlier generations of local/community history to produce a universalized circa. 1930s mythology of an American region. The components of that mythology are worth analyzing in detail, both for what they contain and what they omit from the story. Dick, it must be emphasized, was a pioneer of social history, whose approach was not only anecdotal and descriptive but also extremely fragmented and unintegrated. His chapters bore little relation to each other and often seemed to end abruptly in mid-stream when he ran out of material. Nevertheless, some themes do continue throughout the book, of which four are perhaps worth isolating and discussing in detail. They are: violence; speculation; hardship; and the crude



Nebraska State Historical Society

*Covered wagons head west, from a painting by W. H. Jackson.*

masculinity of frontier society in the American prairie West. As well as examining Dick's treatment of these themes, it might be useful to comment both on how recent scholarship has modified his conclusions and how the American experience appears to have differed from the Canadian.

No subject is more frequently treated in *The Sod-House Frontier* than physical violence. While this ubiquity would appear at first glance to be in consonance with the common mythology of the American West (the "six-gun" image), little of the violence discussed by Dick has much connection to the traditional Hollywood Western. It comes as vigilantism in several forms: as both organized "claims clubs" to protect squatters and prevent claim-jumping and the treatment of criminal behaviour in the days before organized law enforcement. In addition there were homesteader-cattlemen wars; continual armed conflict between settlers, soldiers, and Indians; and much physical fighting about the location of county seats. At the same time, Dick does not make much of the guerilla warfare in Kansas and Nebraska during the Civil War period, although such an analysis would not alter his overall interpretation of an extremely lawless society consisting largely of males and freed from the normal constraints of law and order. Dick seems to accept this lawlessness as a natural consequence of the frontier, and has some tendency to romanticize vigilantism.

There is little doubt that the settlement of the Canadian prairies was far less violent and lawless, although fairly turbulent in its own right. The Métis rose twice in organized fashion in Western Canada, it must be remembered. The usual explanations for the differences north of forty-nine have included the Canadian tendency to survey before settlement rather than after, and the introduction of the North West Mounted Police at the outset. In addition, the American proclivity to a host of individual rights (including the maintenance of guns) has to be included as a factor. But one can overemphasize the differences, many of which are merely a factor of time and circumstance. While the Americans committed their violence in the absence of state authority, Canadians preferred to use the power of the state to achieve roughly the same ends.

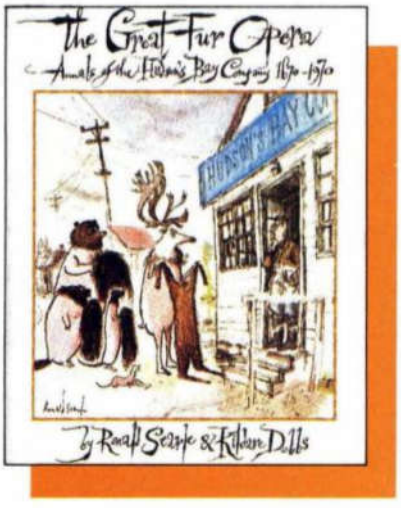
If the Sod-House Frontier was a violent society, it was also a highly speculative one. Dick is very good on the boomer characteristics of the society he has studied, although less adequate on some of the resulting implications. It is true that while he devotes very little attention to actual farming, and far more space is given to towns than to homesteads, this

proportion probably offers a fairly accurate reflection of the action at the time. Dick does not do much with transiency, although constant movement of settlers was one of the consequences of the sort of speculative frontier that he pictures. People came to make money, not to build for the future. The careful reader may well come away from this book with the impression that the author knew perfectly well that persistent homesteaders and settlers (whether in sod houses or not) were far less common than he preferred to suggest. Several recent studies have indicated that land speculation was as commonly rampant in the Canadian as in the American West, and that transiency was as much a reality on both sides of the border.

One of the problems every scholar faces in dealing with Western settlement is the speed with which the advance line of population moved. Although Dick covers a relatively short time period — 1854-1890 — these two generations saw enormously rapid change in the region he considers. Kansas and Nebraska, only opened to settlement in the 1850s, settled down a lot more quickly — and earlier — than the Dakota territories that were populated at roughly the same time as Manitoba. The question of hardship, therefore, depends to a considerable extent upon when and where. It also depends upon one's standards of comparison. Poverty and shortage are not quite the same thing, of course. It does make a difference whether luxuries were unavailable or unaffordable, and it also matters whether such aspects of life as diet and clothing were simply monotonous or truly inadequate. Pioneer belt-tightening in the earliest years of settlement was unquestionably necessary for many families on both sides of the border, although the deprivations described by Dick — particularly in terms of clothing and shoes for children — have no counterpart in the Canadian literature. At the same time, the availability of fresh oysters apparently common in Western American towns — at least as luxury fare — did not extend into the Canadian prairies. Fresh oysters are not the same, of course, as "prairie oysters".

Indeed, the Canadian literature does not as a whole suggest the same extent of deprivation and poverty as Dick does in *The Sod-House Frontier*. There are several possibilities that could explain this difference. One is that Dick exaggerated temporary conditions and made them sound both more general and more permanent than was really the case. Other possible explanations for American/Canadian differences would include the fact that less Canadian settlement preceded the railway than in the United States, as well as the likelihood that more Americans homesteaded because they had less capital resources than


The Great Fur Opera




—the hilarious spoof of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company written by Kildare Dobbs with illustrations by Ronald Searle—has become a Canadian comedy classic since it was published in 1970, the Honourable Company's 300th anniversary year. **The Beaver** is now offering a limited number of a special presentation edition at the low price of $19.98 (postage paid) while supplies last. For your copy of

The Great Fur Opera

send your cheque or money order to

**The Beaver,**
450 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg
Manitoba R3C 0E7.

*"Last Chance Gulch", later Helena, Montana, in the 1860s.*

their Canadian counterparts. This last point has never been carefully investigated, but one does have the clear sense that the Canadian prairie frontier in its early settlement was more middle-class and more prosperous than the American one.

Although women have been part of the invisible West in most American and Canadian historical writing about the region, Everett Dick could scarcely avoid them in what purported to be a social history, "an attempt to depict the life of the common man on the cutting edge of the frontier immediately following the date when it leaped across the Missouri River into Kansas and Nebraska and across the Red River into the vast domain now known as North and South Dakota." Dick came, of course, from a generation far less sensitized to feminist issues than our own. Perhaps symptomatically, he thanked his wife for "her valuable assistance in arranging the material and putting it in final form," a suggestion of intellectual collaboration that did not manifest itself in joint authorship.

Certainly *The Sod-House Frontier* offers little beyond the standard stereotypes of Western women, reflecting to some extent their treatment in contemporary literature. The image of the isolated and broken drudge-like victim perpetuated by Dick owed much of its fashionable currency to the writings of Hamlin Garland, who described his mother's life in this same Western region, which he called "the Middle Border":

> Her life had been always on the border — she knew nothing of civilization's splendor of song and story. All her toilsome, monotonous days rushed through my mind with a roar like a file of gray birds in the night — how little — how tragically small her joys, and how black her sorrow, her toil, her tedium. [Hamlin Garland, *A Pioneer Mother* (Chicago, 1922), p. 18].

As was so often the case in historical treatments of Western women before 1970, Dick alternated the Isolated Victim image with the other common stereotype, the Gentle Tamer, and he could write as lyrically as Hamlin Garland himself:

> Although the life of woman on the plains was rude and hard, her position was legally, educationally, and socially, higher than in the more conservative East. Nevertheless in man's story of the conquest of the prairies, woman is given scant credit for her past. In prairie grass cemeteries in unmarked, forgotten graves sunken with the passing of time, lie the heroines of the far-flung vanguard of permanent civilization, the Marys, Hannahs, Margarets, and Sarahs. These

martyrs who paid the price of the prairie, however, live in the grateful hearts of posterity (p. 236).

Dick does surprisingly little with the third common image of Western women on his frontier: the Wicked Woman. His discussion of the prairie town in the 1870s and 1880s actually suffers from this omission. "Degraded women" who furnished "pleasure for the large group of men uprooted from the routine of domestic life in the East and thrown out into the rugged life on the plains" are mentioned in one sentence of the one paragraph on the saloon (churches get a whole chapter).

Several conclusions are inescapable regarding Dick's treatment of women. In the first place, given his emphasis on social history, women and their activities play a remarkably small role in *The Sod-House Frontier*, appearing briefly in chapter VIII on "The Sod House" but not really coming to centre stage until chapter XVI: "Women and Children on the Frontier". For the author, the prairie frontier was not only "peculiarly severe upon women and oxen," but an essentially masculine world in which women were, as one recent historian has commented, relegated to "a mild kind of American purdah". [John M. Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, 1979), p. 181]. The problem is not that the stereotypical images are completely inaccurate, but that they are unleavened by any appreciation of the possibility that some women might operate in an independent world of their own making. It is this option of autonomy that has been at the heart of much feminist revisionism of western American history.

In his chapter on homesteading, Dick includes a remarkable photograph of four sisters who collectively homesteaded over 1,900 acres in Nebraska, and adds in the text that "Contrary to expectation, a noteworthy proportion of the first settlers were single or unattached women . . . especially noticeable in a land of hardship." He continues:

> They tried without training or physical strength to wrest a living where strong men had great difficulty in maintaining their hold. Many were sensitive, delicate, cultured women, unused to the hard work involved in conquering the plains (p. 129).

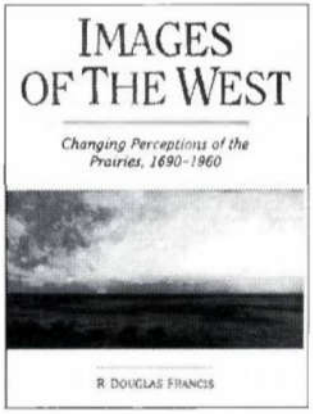
His conclusion to this train of thought, that "A marriageable lady with a homestead certainly was not unattractive in a land of unlimited bachelors who, batching in dugouts and very sorry figures at stag housekeeping, readily succumbed to the wiles of these prairie sirens," (129-130) is a sorry example of the worst sort of undocumented generalization of this work.

Whether the experience of women on Everett Dick's "Sod-House Frontier" was in any substantial way different from those on the Canadian prairies is a moot question that has not yet seriously been explored by feminist scholars on either side of the border. As is the case with so many topics, the recent study of women in the West began within the context of the national scholarship of the United States and Canada, initially virtually ignoring sisters on the other side of the border. More recently, some students have been crossing the border, largely by assuming that it was relatively meaningless, since — as one scholar has put it — "western women in the United States and Canada did similar work, received similar messages about appropriate domestic roles, and were granted the vote before eastern women." Arriving at any credible position on the question, of course, will require a detailed analysis of not only the roles of women in the societies of the prairie regions of the United States and Canada, but of the nature of those societies

RIESE'S
CANADIAN LAKE
WILD RICE

**WILD RICE GRADE A - #1**
**NATURALLY GROWN**
Buy direct from grower. Makes excellent gifts.
$59.50 - 10 lbs. individually packed with recipe books
$54.50 - 10 lbs. bulk
POSTAGE PAID. CHEQUE, VISA, MASTERCARD.
**Riese's Canadian Lake Wild Rice**
**Box 899, La Ronge, Sask. S0J 1L0**
**(306) 425-2314**

**BOOK CATALOGS**
Devoted To
**Arctic, Western Canadiana**
**Fur Trade, Exploration**
**RARE & OUT-OF-PRINT**
**Send us your wantlists!**
4 Catalogs: $7.00, refundable with purchase.
Foreign: remit $8.00, U.S. funds.
**BJARNE'S BOOKS**
10005 Whyte Ave.
Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA
T6E 1Z2 (403) 439-7133



**Images of the West**
**Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690 - 1960**
*by R. Douglas Francis*
From wasteland to utopia
**50 black & white illustrations**
**12 colour illustrations**
**$27.50 hardcover**
***Available at Bookstores Everywhere***
Western Producer Prairie Books
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

themselves and their historic development over time.

Whatever Everett Dick's other contributions to the development of Western American historiography, one undisputed one was to the visual inconography of westward expansion. The Sod-House Frontier was settled during the era of the camera, and while Dick's book is hardly copiously illustrated, most of its thirty-two illustrations are carefully-chosen photographs, many of which have entered Western mythology. Not the Chrisman sisters noted above, one hastens to add, but photographs such as "Fence Cutting in the Homesteader-Cattleman War" showing four masked cowboys carefully posed with wire cutters at a barbed wire fence or "A Sod-House Family," children barefoot and the cow on the roof. These images have become familiar ones in Western Americana.

Surprisingly large segments of Dick's version of the "Sod-House Frontier" are still with us, either as part of the mythology or — all too often, one suspects — as part of the "true historical record". There are several reasons for this continued vitality. One is that Dick wrote well and collected a number of fascinating and amusing anecdotes. Another is that he painted on a fairly large canvas in fairly bold strokes, fulfilling a need for information that no one has replaced. Carefully constructed and measured academic monographs simply will not replace such works as *The Sod-House Frontier*, and it is time that modern scholarship on both sides of the border came to terms with this reality. We need well-crafted works of synthesis, such as Dick's book was for its time, if the "new history" is to become in any way meaningful to the lay audience.

*J.M. Bumsted is professor of history at St. John's College, University of Manitoba.*

# Rocks and Brooms

## By Tom Saunders

**CURLING CAPITAL**
**Winnipeg and the Roarin' Game**

By Morris Mott and John Allardyce. University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1989. 171 pp., illus. $29.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Not too many years ago, when a student at the university level enrolled in classes in history, it was assumed that he (or she) would be studying mainly constitutional, political, diplomatic and economic history, with perhaps a dash of military history thrown in. There would be the history of conquests and migrations, of city states, nations and empires (including land and sea empires and the commercial empires of more recent times). But there was little in the way of specialization. This is something that has come to the fore in the last 50 or 60 years.

Earlier historians undoubtedly paid some attention to social history, as in noting the effects of the change from a slave to a free economy in the Graeco-Roman world or the emergence of feudalism in Europe. They considered such things as the role of the Church and its social influence in the Middle Ages, and the relationship between Protestantism (particularly Calvinism) and capitalism and its effect on the cultures of Europe and North America; and they dealt with such subjects as the social effects of the industrial revolution in England and the role of the frontier on this continent. In more recent times they have taken note of the impact of the Great Depression and modern scientific technology; and so on. But they did not specialize in social history as such.

Today we not only have specialists in social history but in special aspects of social history, such as local history and sports history. We have arrived, in short, at specializations within specializations; though it is hard to determine at times where one specialization ends and another begins.

This book is indicative of the trend. It is sports history in that it deals with the history of a sport; it is social history in that it endeavours to relate that sport to the milieu in which it has been played; it is local history in that it deals with these things in a specific locale (the city of Winnipeg).

Technically, the book by Morris Mott and John Allardyce comes to us as sports history which, as one of the more recent areas of specialization, has not yet won the respect of some traditional historians. The reviewer recalls the late A.R.M. Lower (then dean of Canadian historians) arriving at Winnipeg airport some years ago on a Grey Cup afternoon quite unaware that the Grey Cup game was on or what it meant to millions of Canadians, including his one-time student whom he had asked to meet him.

But, as the new breed of sports historian points out, sport has had

**Out-of-Print**
Canadian Books, Pamphlets and Periodicals
History ● Biography ● Art
Literature ● Exploration etc.
Catalogue Free on Request
**Huronia-Canadiana Books**
**(Helen & John Wray)**
705-435-7255
Box 685, Alliston, Ontario L0M 1A0

*Curling enthusiasts pose for the camera, 1908. From "Curling Capital".*

a role to play in many societies over a long period of time, and we cannot fully appreciate the cultures of those societies without considering the role played by sport. Sport was such an integral part of the societies of ancient Greece, for example, that there were times when they went so far as to declare a truce in the warfare that erupted upon occasion between or among their various city states in order that their games, including their Olympiads, might take place.

Certainly no one can deny the impact of both participant and spectator sports in our own times, when professional athletes command salaries that run into the millions of dollars (thanks to radio and television) and when golf courses are crowded with people of both sexes (who have no hope of becoming professionals) whenever weather permits.

For many people today sport has become almost a religion; and, while curling plays only a minor role in the contemporary world's over-all sports picture, it has assumed a growing importance in some countries in Europe and in the northern United States. It has assumed a significantly greater role in Canada, where the climate has been conducive to it, and where, in isolated rural communities (especially on the prairies), it has had a social importance to the people.

But curling has had a role to play in Canadian city life too; and it is the authors' claim that no city in Canada has been so identified with curling as Winnipeg. Winnipeg, they inform us, is not just the curling capital of Canada but of the world; and they produce evidence to support their view. Winnipeg, they point out, has for many years been host to what it likes to advertise as "the world's largest bonspiel", and its top rinks have won more national championships than rinks from any other province. The book includes the names (and something of the records) of all the great Winnipeg skips, with particular emphasis on the period between 1927 (when national championships were inaugurated) and 1957. During this period Winnipeg rinks won so many titles it was a major upset if they did not.

The main reasons for Winnipeg's dominance during these years, the authors suggest, were probably the long history of the game in Manitoba and the fact that artificial ice was not available until mid-century (something that placed curlers from some other provinces at a disadvantage). They also note that, from early in the century, the Winnipeg media gave a prominence to curling that was lacking elsewhere.

They acknowledge that, since 1957, Winnipeg curlers have not dominated the game as they once did, but they find solace in the fact that Winnipeggers have had much to do with the increased popularity of the sport across Canada and abroad.

It was a Winnipegger (and three-time Brier champion), Ken Watson,

they point out, who got the Scotch Cup (predecessor of The Silver Broom) on the rails; and it was he, along with Maurice Smith, late sports editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, who paved the way for a national schoolboys' championship (later to become the junior men's championship.) It was another Winnipegger, George J. Cameron, who was mainly instrumental in getting the Macdonald Tobacco Company to sponsor a national men's championship (The Brier); it was Bill Lumsden, a former president of the Manitoba Curling Association, who was the key figure in establishing a national senior men's championship and in persuading Air Canada to sponsor The Silver Broom; it was Ina Light who was the official most responsible for creating the world's junior women's championship; and it was Winnipeg instructors, most notably Ray Turnbull, who helped make European curlers the force they have become in recent decades.

In all of this, there are times when a reader may feel that the authors claim rather more for Winnipeg than is its due. Winnipeg instructors, for example, are not the only ones who have helped improve the skills of Europeans; and Albertans may take umbrage at the fact that the book almost seems to go out of its way to claim a Winnipeg influence on such curlers as Cliff Manahan and Pat Ryan (who won their titles for Alberta) because they spent some time in Winnipeg before moving two provinces farther west. This is not the way to win friends and influence people; and this tendency on the part of Winnipeggers may be one of the things that has stood in the way of Winnipeg's dream of having a Canadian Curling Hall of Fame located in that city. One suspects that this book may find greater acceptance in Winnipeg than in some other parts of Canada.

But there is more to these pages than curling. Morris Mott teaches Sports History at Brandon University and John Allardyce has an M.A. in History. They endeavour to relate curling to the milieu in which it has been played.

Curling was introduced to Winnipeg, they point out, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, largely by people who had migrated to the new province of Manitoba from Ontario, and they were mainly of Scottish — or, at least, Anglo-Saxon — descent. They were, moreover, mostly from the upper-middle class. It took a long time before names like Meleschuk, Braunstein, Romano, Hanasiak, Gunnlaugson, Pidzarko, etc., made their appearance, and before curling became no longer exclusively a game for the upper-middle class.

But perhaps the greatest single factor in the history of the game has been the increasing role played by women, both on the ice and at the executive level. It was only gradually that women became active participants, and competitive curling for women is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

These developments all reflect changes not only in curling but in Canadian society. Another change is the role played by the Church. For many years a feature of the Winnipeg bonspiel was its annual church service; but, in an increasingly secular society, the church service has been done away with along with the one-time reverence for Sunday. Today, instead of attending church on Bonspiel Sunday, curlers are on the ice.

Perhaps the most recent reflection of a changing society is that The Brier is no longer sponsored by a tobacco firm but by a brewery. In the 1980s beer is very much in and tobacco out.

For traditional historians and literary purists, the book by Morris Mott and John Allardyce may be something less than a classic. Its style is pedestrian, and even a little good journalese might have brightened it up. There are also spelling and other lapses that one would not expect in a book produced by an academic press.

Two of the more glaring examples of this occur on page 16, where the title and words of a curling song to the tune of the old English ballad, *D'ye Ken John Peel?* are really mangled. The book quotes the title as *Dae yae ken John Peel* (there are no such words as "dae" and "yae" in either English or Scots); and, in the body of the text, it spells "what'er" and "whene'er" as "what ere" and "when ere". (The Scots may pronounce "do" as "dae", but they "dae" not spell it that way.) Even if that is how the spelling went in the song-sheet it came from, one would expect better from academic historians and an academic press.

Perhaps the traditional historians have a point: Sports History is still in its infancy, and has some growing-up to do before it becomes a fully recognized academic discipline.

---

*Winnipeg poet and editor Tom Saunders has spent many hours of his life on a curling rink, broom in hand.*


**THE BEAVER IN MICROFORM**

Back issues of *The Beaver* in microform are available from:

**Micromedia Limited**
*Information Access*

158 Pearl Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 1L3
(416) 593-5211
Toll Free
1-800-387-2689

**Canoe Canada's Arctic**

**7 - 19 day expeditions**

Fly-in canoe trips into the heart of North America's last great wilderness: the tundra & taiga of Canada's Northwest Territories. Discover the warm dry summers, spectacular scenery & unparalleled wildlife concentrations of a land untouched by man. Photograph caribou herds, white wolves, muskox, moose, grizzlies & rich birdlife. Virgin fishing for lake trout, grayling, northern pike.

Small groups (8 persons max.) assembled, outfitted & guided by Alex Hall, wildlife biologist & veteran arctic canoeing guide. CAN ACCOMMODATE A LIMITED NUMBER WITH NO PREVIOUS CANOEING EXPERIENCE. Season, June 1 - Sept. 15. Operating the most remote wilderness expeditions in North America since 1974. For brochure write:

**CANOE ARCTIC INC.**
P.O. Box 1301
Fort Smith, N.W.T. Canada
X0E 0P0

# Trader of the North

## By Anne Morton

**TRADER, TRIPPER, TRAPPER**
**The Life of a Bay Man**

By Sydney Augustus Keighley, photographs by S.A. Keighley. (In collaboration with Renée Fosset Jones and David Kirkby Riddle.) Rupert's Land Research Centre and Watson & Dwyer Publishing, Winnipeg, 1989. 219 pp., illus. $14.95 paper.

To be a citizen of the New World is to know that Huck Finn chose the better part:

> But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before.

Timid stay-at-homes, we love to read about those who lit out for freedom. Syd Keighley is one of those who did just that.

In this autobiography he has made us a gift of his life from boyhood to old age. In photographs from the age of two to the age of eighty-eight we see always the same confident face, full of a sense of its owner's dignity and worth, with which, as a handsome, cocky young man, he regards us from the book's cover. An active, competitive, scrappy individual, fond of shooting, hunting, trapping, fist-fighting, drinking and playing poker, he remembers as the "worst summer" of his long life one during his boyhood in Benito, Manitoba, that he was forced to spend laid up as a result of a serious injury to his leg: "This was torture because all of my friends were out swimming and exploring while I was cooped up at home." In 1954 he worked for Great West Saddlery in Winnipeg, an experience which brought to mind his time "in the cage" as a bank teller in 1917:

> I was as miserable in July 1954 as I had been in July 1917. I was a man in a trap, and after three months I quit my job and started to look for ways to re-establish myself in trade.

He has this to say about his honourable discharge from the army, apparently engineered by his mother, who had informed the authorities that her son had joined up at the age of 15:

> She had gotten involved with a church in Winnipeg and was influenced by any preacher that talked to her. There is little doubt in my mind that one of these preachers had got her to interfere and write these letters. If I had known at the time what she had done I would have told her what I thought of her and her friends.

Later, when I was working in the north, I saw all kinds of interference in people's lives caused by preachers. I guess this is why I


**SKYSCRAPERS**
**HIDE THE HEAVENS**

THE HISTORY OF INDIAN-WHITE RELATIONS IN CANADA

**J.R. Miller**

A comprehensive account that begins with an era of mutually beneficial contact in the fur trade and goes up to the present day when Indians are organizing to resist displacement and marginalization.

'If we do learn anything from history it will be because of histories like *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, which help put into perspective what Buffy Ste. Marie sings about as the "bitter past" and give to Indian-white relations a sense of hope.'
M.T. Kelly, *Globe and Mail*

$35.00

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

always tried to avoid being around them in later life.

It seems entirely appropriate that when Keighley lit out for the North in 1917 to work for the Hudson's Bay Company one of the first people he encountered was a character who claimed to be a relative of Mark Twain's. (And perhaps he was. He must have had an imaginative streak, as Keighley calls him "the biggest b-s-er I ever knew.")

The freedom Keighley found for himself in the North and observed in those around him was not the freedom of laziness and eccentricity. In the North natives and whites, women and men all worked and worked hard. So did the dogs and the horses, and the wild animals too had their role to play either as a source of income or a source of energy for all that toil.

Keighley tells a story about the necessity of hard work which has the force of a parable. A man called Walter McKenzie who had one of the contracts to cut hay for the horse-teams operated out of Prince Albert by R.D. Brookes cut the hay frozen as "a lot simpler and easier than cutting live hay." Frozen hay lacks the nourishment of properly made hay and that year thirty-five horses died on the return journey from Reindeer Lake.

Hard work had nothing to do with drudgery or clock-watching. It was freely undertaken by individuals to achieve their chosen goals, as in this description of canoe-making at Stanley in the 1920s:

> A man and his wife could make a [birchbark] canoe in just a few days. When the Indians worked they worked steadily. If there was a job to do, there was no stopping for coffee breaks, and no one was thinking about "working 9 to 5." It was simply carry on at the job until it was done.

People certainly did not stop work for winter for this was a busy, productive time. This is why Keighley became a "tripper", travelling to winter camps to get furs so the trappers would not have to waste time coming to the post.

Even leisure time was active. Much time and effort and skill went into beautifying clothing. At Montreal Lake there was a dance almost every night in the summer.

*A young Sydney Keighley wearing his Company cap.*

Keighley's photographs, an abundant selection of which are used in the book, present the North not as a landscape but as a field of human activity, with people either about to set off on the trail or standing proudly by the results of their labour. Life on the trail is little represented, as Keighley usually did not take his camera with him on his travels, but the text is full of the adventures, some of them pretty hair-raising, involved in the act of getting from point A to point B. Today, as Keighley points out, we think nothing of travelling and are prepared to go hundreds of miles just to attend a wedding. In his time in the North, on the other hand, travelling could demand the fullest use of one's physical and mental resources. It was a world which did "not suffer fools gladly or for very long". And that was the joy of it. To live and work in the North proved one's virtue, one's success as a person.

From 1917 to 1938 Keighley lived his life in the North in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was and is proud to be a Bay man, and speaks well too of his time in the army. The Company cap he wears in the self-portrait shown here is worn proudly but what would one of those dreaded Regimental Sergeant-Majors have said about that jaunty angle and that slightly beat-up look? In fact, Keighley was ambiguous in his attitude towards the Company and is honest enough not to conceal that ambiguity. To a boy of 17 the Company offered freedom, "the opportunity to live in what I considered ideal circumstances". To the man in his 30s it became another trap, for there was simply nowhere to go. Few jobs were available at the level of District Manager, and the Company would never have given him such a position because he had an Indian wife and because he served them best as the energetic self-starter of a post manager that he was. (At Caribou he even made toboggans which the Company could sell at $35 for a bigger profit than factory-made ones at $50.) One may doubt whether Keighley, who was transferred at his own request from Big Trout Lake in Ontario because he "preferred a less routine and regimented life", really wanted advancement and an office in Hudson's Bay House. His wish for advancement cloaked a wish for freedom, and when he came to see this, he lit out from the Company to go into business for himself. For the rest of his life the risk, the profit and the loss would be his. Yet even this freedom was partly due to the financial cushion provided by his years with the Company.

Keighley's decision to leave the Company may also have had something to do with the emotional turmoil resulting from the breakdown of his first marriage. With a respect for his own privacy and that of the late Rachel McKenzie which can only be admired, Keighley tells us little about their marriage, but we are left in no doubt as to how unhappy its failure made him — so unhappy that he destroyed all his photographs of her.

> Rachel was eighteen when I married her [at Stanley in 1923]. . . . She was a pretty, lively girl, well educated and capable, and I was lonely. Only two people on the reserve spoke English besides myself. One was Charlie

Cook . . . and the other was Rachel. Because of this we spent quite a bit of time together, and I thought we could have a happy life. Within two years, I knew that we had both made a mistake, and over the next ten years my marriage crumbled.

At almost 23, Keighley already knew a lot about travelling in the North but for the longest journey he chose the wrong companion, much as he had done some years before when he went on a near-disastrous trip with the sixteen-year old Solomon Merasty.

As Keighley did not bother to ask the necessary permission from the Company for his marriage, it was literally the act of a free man. With the freedom to make one's own choices there comes no guarantee that the choices will turn out well. This is what Hilda Lessways, the heroine of Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* trilogy, means when she longs fiercely to be "as free and unhappy as a man" — to have the freedom and responsibility and pain of an adult human being.

Keighley's emphasis on freedom has a political as well as an individual dimension. He thinks little of prohibition ("a dumb idea") and even less of the CCF government in Saskatchewan and its nationalization of raw fur and fish production. And the current plight of native people today is attributed squarely to the fact that their right to a free, responsible life has been taken from them.

Syd Keighley wanted to write down his memories of his life so that young people should "realize the hardships of life for the first settlers and the traders and trappers that opened up the north [and] have a sense of the dignity and value of their ancestors' lives." His purpose, that is, was as much moral as informative. We do learn a lot about the North from the book, which is a valuable addition to the list of fur trade autobiographies, but, more importantly, we are reminded of the harsh and liberating truth that our lives are ours to make of them what we will, in whatever time and place we live, and that no crime is greater than to deny others the right to choose what they will make of their lives.

Our thanks are owed to Keighley and to all those who helped him in producing and publishing his book — the Canada Council and the Manitoba Arts Council, the Watson & Dwyer Publishing, but above all to his two collaborators, Renée Jones and David Riddle who, by encouraging and assisting Keighley to expand his original manuscript, which dealt only with his work for the Company, have given us a book which accomplishes the chief end of biography. *Trader, Tripper, Trapper* shows us how life can be lived.

---

*Anne Morton is an archivist with the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg.*

ARCTIC WATERWAYS The Gentle Rafters

offers the **possible** dream! Come, float the Coppermine, Horton or Anderson rivers, glistening in the midnight sun of Canada's Northwest Territories! The tundra awaits with its flora and wildlife. Peek into the nests of eagles and falcons, see caribou and muskoxen, or fish for char and grayling in teeming waters! An incomparable adventure! Large, safe inflatables! No motors! Small groups! **Sex or age is no barrier! Good health and a real love of the outdoors are the only prerequisites!** 11- to 14-day trips. July and August. Write or call:

**ARCTIC WATERWAYS Inc.**
Dept. B Stevensville, Ontario
Canada L0S 1S0 Tel. (416) 382-3882

**OUR 16th YEAR ON THE COPPERMINE!**

Greenbank

*Country Matters in 19th Century Ontario*
SOCIAL HISTORY WITH A HUMAN FACE

*. . . a miracle of a book.*
SCOTT SYMONS, *SATURDAY NIGHT*

*. . . may permanently change the way we see a country spire, a concession road, even a pound of butter.*
CHRISTOPHER MOORE, *BOOKS IN CANADA*

*. . . good humoured . . . worldy wise . . . absolutely superb*
ROYCE MACGILLIVRAY, *GLOBE AND MAIL*

A VERY SPECIAL GIFT!

LAVISHLY PRODUCED LARGE FORMAT SOFT COVER

OVER 100 ILLUSTRATIONS, 320 PP.

$24.95

*Order by cheque, VISA or M/C. Telephone: 705-743-8990 collect. Mail order: Broadview Press, PO Box 1243, Peterborough, Ont. K9J 7H5.*

# Canada Goes to War

## By Robert Saunders

**MARCHING TO ARMAGEDDON**
**Canadians and the Great War**
**1914 - 1918**

By Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein. Lester & Orpen Dennys, Toronto, 1989. 288 pp., illus. $35.00.

We know it now as World War I but in the 1920s and 1930s it was simply the Great War. As Vernon Scannell wrote:

> When war is spoken of
> I find
> The war that was called
> Great
> Invades the mind.

Those four terrible years of suffering and death left a fearful legacy. By the time the war was over, the old Victorian sense of security had been shattered forever and, with it, that buoyant, hopeful liberal spirit that had once seemed so triumphant. Never, in Philip Larkin's phrase, was there to be such innocence again.

Two well-known Canadian historians — Desmond Morton, principal of Erindale College, Mississauga, Ontario, and J.L. Granatstein of York University, Toronto — have marked this year's 75th anniversary of the outbreak of the war with *Marching to Armageddon,* a clear, concise account of Canada's part in the conflict. Another volume deals with World War II which began 50 years ago this fall.

*Marching to Armageddon* is concerned equally with the fighting in France and the impact of the war on Canada itself. Its scholarship is virtually impeccable and I was able to detect only one, niggling error of fact. Lord Beaverbrook was not "New-Brunswick-born". His place

The Happy Man Today
is the Man at the Front
Royal Highlanders of Canada
BLACK WATCH
JOIN THE 73rd NOW
429 BLEURY ST. MONTREAL

of birth was Maple, Ontario, where his father was a Presbyterian minister.

The strategies and tactics of the Great War have provoked passionate debate among historians and it is not the least of the virtues of the Morton-Granatstein book that it remains remarkably fair and balanced throughout. The acid test here is the assessment of Sir Douglas Haig. Was he an unimaginative bungler, "brilliant to the top of his army boots," in Lloyd George's biting witticism? Can the Somme disaster be blamed on his bull-headed obstinacy? Or was he, rather — as John Terraine and others have argued — the outstanding military figure of the war? Here is what the authors of *Marching to Armageddon* have to say:

"The new British commander (Haig) did not entirely fit the stereotype of a mindless ex-cavalry officer. Except in French, which he spoke well, Haig was painfully inarticulate, acutely unimaginative and conventional; he shared a military contempt for politicians and their art but he was no fool. At fifty-four he was young enough to learn both politics and war. Neither was Haig a genius: the pre-war British army would not have accepted him if he had been. Haig's chief eccentricity was a profound Christian faith and a calm conviction of divine mission. He was proof against a general's worst enemy, despair. Haig knew that he would succeed and, if one means failed, he would find another."

No jurist could have summed up better.

The illustrations deserve special praise. Good maps are vital to any military history and those in *Marching to Armageddon* are admirably clear, with enough detail to allow the reader to follow the course of the battle but without the clutter of unnecessary names that sometimes mars such maps. The black-and-white photos are well selected. Some of them, such as the one of the Canadian troops marching across the Rhine into Bonn in 1918, are familiar enough but many are striking and less well known. There is one, for instance, of a Canadian soldier trying to comfort an orphaned Belgian child and another of a group of extremely young German soldiers — none looking much more than 15 years old — being led into captivity. (This was near the end of the war.) Both these pictures convey a sense of the pathos of war and carry as much emotional impact as more gruesome photos of mangled bodies and hideously mutilated soldiers.

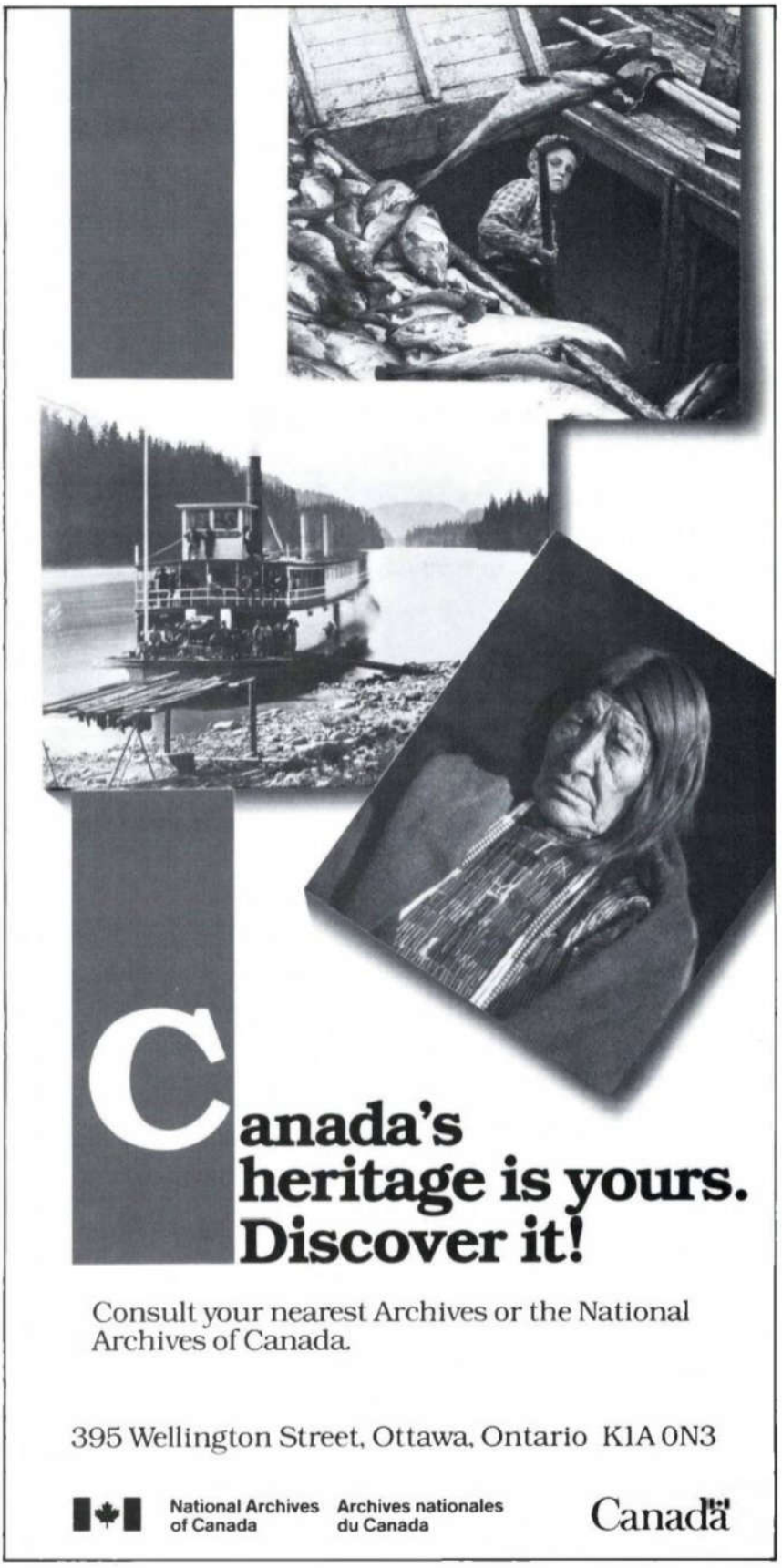
In this age of shoddy book-making, the publishers of this volume can be commended for the superb

reproductions of paintings by various war artists. Nearly all these paintings are notably anti-heroic and particular mention should be made of the eerie depictions of stricken battlefields by Thurston Topham, Maurice Cullen and F.H. Varley, the latter one of the founders of the Group of Seven.

Certain reflections about the Great War and about war in general occur to the reader of this book. It would, for instance, be sobering for politicians and self-confident commentators today to consider how utterly wrong nearly everyone was in the summer of 1914 about the course the war would subsequently take. It was universally accepted that the war would last only a few months at the most and that, in the phrase current at the time, it would be "over by Christmas". It is true that Lord Kitchener, seemingly the most stolid and unimaginative of men, had an intuitive glimpse of the prolonged ordeal that lay ahead, but he was an exception. Some years earlier, a Warsaw banker named Ivan Bloch had pointed out that weapons had become so sophisticated and horrifying that another war would inevitably lead to mass casualties and military stalemate. Generals, however, have seldom bothered to pay much attention to mere bankers.

When Bloch had been proved right after all and the fighting had settled into the stalemate of trench warfare, the pendulum swung the other way. Now it seemed as if the war would never end and that the hopeless, futile struggle would be waged for all eternity. As Winston Churchill was to write in *The World Crisis*, his history of the war: "Before the war it had seemed incredible that such terrors and slaughters, even if they began, could last more than a few months. After the first two years it was difficult to believe that they would ever end. We seemed separated from the old life by a measureless gulf."

War is never anything but horrible, but the Great War seemed more hellish than most. The authors of *Marching to Armageddon* are right to remind us of what our fath-



Canada's heritage is yours. Discover it!
Consult your nearest Archives or the National Archives of Canada.
395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N3
National Archives of Canada
Archives nationales du Canada
Canada

ers and grandfathers endured. We forget too easily. This account refrains from righteous rhetoric but, instead, lets those who took part tell their own stories. Here, for instance, is Charles Yale Harrison, an American who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He is recalling what his feelings were when the Germans unleashed a heavy artillery barrage:

"I am terrified. I hug the earth, digging my fingers into every crevice, every hole.

"A blinding flash and an explosive howl a few feet in front of the trench.

"My bowels liquefy.

"Acrid smoke bites the throat, parches the mouth. I am beyond mere fright. I am frozen with an insane fear that keeps me cowering in the bottom of the trench. I lie flat on my belly, waiting . . . .

Suddenly it stops."

It was not until a decade later that civilians at home gradually became aware of what trench warfare had meant. While the war was on, those writers and journalists who had visited the Front and witnessed the horrors at first hand, came home again and wrote lies. It seemed to them necessary to do this to maintain civilian morale and so they depicted the troops in France as laughing, high-spirited youngsters eager to have another bash at the Boche. Some of the most eminent authors of the day took part in this deceit. Peter Buitenhuis has made a detailed study of this shameful business in his book, *The Great War of Words*.

In the last months of 1918 there came the Hundred Days and then the war, which had seemed interminable, was over at last. Canadians could pause and look around them. What they saw was a world bleaker and more brutal than anything they could have imagined in Laurier's sunshine days, but they faced the future with a new-found pride in their achievements and with a renewed conviction that they belonged to a country that had still great things to accomplish.

*Marching to Armageddon* contains several useful appendices. One gives the Order of Battle for The Canadian Corps and other Canadian formations in the field in November 1918. Another analyses the enlistments and the casualties for the CEF. It concludes that out of a total enlistment of 619,636, there were 59,544 deaths and 172,950 non-fatal casualties. A third appendix provides a statistical summary of some of the social and economic changes in wartime Canada regarding labour, prices and public finance.

**A NATION FORGED IN FIRE**
**Canadians and the Second World War**
**1939 - 1945**

By J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton. Lester & Orpen Dennys, Toronto, 1989. 287 pp., illus. $35.00.

*A Nation Forged in Fire* is a clear, concise, well-written account of the Second World War, a war which started fifty years ago. This book has all the merits that characterize *Marching to Armageddon*. Once again, campaigns and battles are lucidly explained with the help of good maps and a selection of eyewitness accounts. This is as handsome a volume as its predecessor and the reproduction of paintings by various war artists are again excellent. Artists such as Charles Comfort, Alex Colville and Tom Wood are well represented.

This was predominantly a photographer's war, however, and the black-and-white photos in this book are striking and unhackneyed. The mood preceding the D-Day invasion, for instance, is conveyed by a quiet picture showing three men of the Royal Canadian Engineers pausing for a brief prayer with an army chaplain before embarking on their landing-craft. Another friendly, homely picture shows some men from the Fort Garry Horse working on a broken tank tread while a couple of young Dutch boys watch. There are, of course, plenty of other pictures, grisly and violent, that convey the horror and futility of war.

Nor is the home front neglected in *A Nation Forged in Fire*. The politician, the housewife and the factory worker all play their respective roles in the drama. What strikes a reader of both the Granatstein-Morton books is how differently the two wars affected Canada.

In both the wars the issue of conscription threatened to tear the country apart, but in the second war the strain was less severe, the clamor more muted. That this was so was due above all to the political shrewdness, not to say cunning, of Mackenzie King. The wily manoeuvrings of the man referred to by Granatstein-Morton as "that strange, incalculable" man, makes fascinating reading and could act as a textbook in the art of political duelling. King's handling of conscription is not one of the very noblest chapters in Canadian history but the nation emerged from the ordeal without the festering internal wounds that had been inflicted in the earlier war by the crisis of 1917. It can be argued that Sir Robert Borden was a much finer man than Mackenzie King, but

there is also no doubt that he was a clumsier politician.

Economically, Canada came of age as an industrial state in World War II. During the 1914 war, the country had produced no weapons apart from the infamous Ross rifle and war production had been largely confined to the manufacture of shells for the always hungry guns in France.

In World War II, though, Canada produced a steady supply of planes (including Lancaster bombers), ships, tanks and other military vehicles as well as a great variety of guns and small arms. It has been estimated that by the fall of 1943 there were more than a million Canadians engaged in war production and four-fifths of these were directly involved in war manufacture.

Another point that is well brought out in *A Nation Forged in Fire* is that the war saw a steady increase in government intervention in economic affairs and in the day-to-day lives of the average citizens. No doubt this would have happened anyway, whether war had broken out in 1939 or not. One of the first photographs in this book shows an unemployed worker standing on the corner of a street in the 1930s and the caption under the picture points out that the hardships of the Depression led many to the conviction that unrestrained capitalism had failed. A degree of socialism, in some form or other, was probably bound to come but the war hastened the process by making government intervention seem acceptable and even patriotic.

Donald Creighton called the volume he wrote for the Canadian Centenary Series covering this period *The Forked Road*. The precise meaning he gave to his title is not altogether clear but it is likely that this emergence of *etatisme* was one of those decisive forks in Canada's road that he had in mind. It is probable also that Creighton regarded this development a good deal more sourly than do Messrs. Granatstein and Morton.

By 1945 Canada was indeed a nation forged in the fire of war. When the earlier conflict had ended in 1918 the country had finally come to understand that it need no longer be tied to Britain's apron strings, but this was still the infancy of her nationhood and world recognition of her sovereign status was yet to come. It has been suggested that even as late as World War II there were British generals — Montgomery in particular — who persisted in regarding the Canadians as "colonial" troops, whatever such documents as the Statute of Westminster might have said to the contrary.

By the war's end there was no doubt about Canada's place. In what is almost the final photograph in *A Nation Forged in Fire* a sleek-looking Mackenzie King is shown in 1945 at the United Nations' founding at San Francisco. The prime minister is depicted grinning as widely as any Cheshire cat, and well he might. Canada, with her proud war record and her vibrant economy and with diplomats equal in calibre to any in the world, was ready to take her place as a leading "middle power" in the councils of the world.

*"The Hitler Line", by Charles Comfort, shows Canadian troops advancing, May 1944. From "A Nation Forged in Fire".*

---

*Robert Saunders recently retired from the editorial page of the "Winnipeg Free Press". He is a frequent reviewer for "The Beaver", especially on military topics.*


**If you own ecologically valuable land and would like it to stay that way, The Nature Conservancy of Canada can help.**

- Purchases • Gifts
- Bequests • Easements
- Stewardships

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA
794A Broadview Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M4K 2P7
(416) 469-1701

# York Factory As It Was

## By Shirlee Anne Smith

**THE MOST RESPECTABLE PLACE IN THE TERRITORY**
**Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service, York Factory, 1788 to 1870**

By Michael Payne, National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, 1989. 206 pp., illus. $11.95.

This history begins in the year 1788 when York Factory had been established for over a century. It was to become the great coastal depot and meeting place of the "incomers" and "outgoers" of Rupert's Land. Here all the goods were unpacked and repacked for the inland settlements, and the furs and country produce sent home on the annual ship to be auctioned and carried off to various European cities. The documents in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives for York Factory consulted by the author are a rich source for various disciplines, but for the day-to-day details of fur trade living, he also relied on surviving collections of personal letters, including the correspondence of Chief Factor James Hargrave and his wife Letitia, who lived there in the 1840s.

The book is divided into chapters of Social Structure and Social Relations; Work; Leisure; Accidents, Disease and Medical Care; Education and Religion; and Standard of Living.

Writing about social structure and social relations, given the lack of precise documentation, can be fraught with black holes. The author is right to question the Company's habit of attributing general cultural characteristics to employees from a specific area. Orkneymen might appear docile and frugal, for instance, but they could also form cabals and make life extremely difficult for their supervising officer, especially if he happened to be an Englishman.

Throughout the Company's history "pilfering" has always been a problem carried out by numerous ingenious methods for unusual ends. When the sloopers in 1791 made off with part of the sails "to make trowsers", the offence is described by the author as minor. Given the importance of sea transportation, the once-a-year delivery, and the fact that the journal entry was marked for the attention of the London officials, one is inclined to believe that the offence was major.

The author devotes 35 pages to the "Standard of Living" covering clothing, housing, and food. The details on clothing give the reader a vivid picture of the dress of the eighteenth-century employee, including "slops" (cheap ready-made clothing), and the beaver toggy (a calf-length greatcoat with the fur inwards). The hooded blanket coat, however, was standard winter wear for fur traders before 1821 and no doubt this also applied to York Factory.

The greatest improvement in housing was the substitution of individual buildings heated by Carron stoves for the large structures of the eighteenth century with 66 "bedplaces". The mosquito blinds first recorded in 1840 must have greatly ameliorated the miseries of summer life. The appeal of wintering away from York Factory in log tents was probably due more to the fact that the men were away from the prying eyes of the Chief Factor with more freedom to live with their native wives and children, than the green wood which resulted in smoke-filled rooms mentioned by the author.

The modern reader will probably consider the amount of food consumed by the fur traders as bordering on gluttony. But the perception has to be based on the realities of the century under study when hard physical labour required more calories and feasts of venison, ducks, geese, plovers and ptarmigan, with few vegetables, except potatoes, were the mainstay of workingmen's lives. They were also not unfamiliar with short rations.

Information on the household servants, including butlers, cooks, maids, and laundresses (the grandmother of the famous Charles Camsell was one), is lacking. Today's daily showered and shampooed generation may also wonder

**THE FAR NORTHWEST**
**Yukon • Alaska • Western NWT**

We at ARCTIC EDGE specialize in our home region. Our exceptional guided trips (canoe, raft, backpack, ski) feature wildlife, natural history, and North country lore . . . for the discriminating. We aren't summer visitors . . . we live here. Come join us.

Colour brochure.

**ARCTIC EDGE Ltd.**
Box 4850 (B)
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 4N6
(403) 633-5470

**A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS**

From time to time *The Beaver* exchanges its mailing list with other publications and organizations offering information, goods or services considered of special interest to readers of this magazine.

As a subscriber to *The Beaver* you may request that your name be excluded from such exchanges by writing to *The Beaver*, Circulation Department, 450 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3C 0E7.

*A Christmas dance at Bachelors' Hall, York Factory in the 1840s, from "The Most Respectable Place in the Territory".*

about personal hygiene. Owing to the lack of evidence one has to assume that the total fur trader's body and head rarely, if ever, felt water.

To enjoy reading history one should have a lively imagination, a curious mind, a reasonable understanding of the period, and a degree of scepticism. Socialists, for instance, may approve that it takes 27 pages to relate the leisure or recreational activities of the Hudson's Bay Company employees, while readers devoted to the work ethic may be disconcerted to find only 12.5 pages assigned to work. In a century when considerable stature was given people who could "write a fine hand", one wonders if the employees found copying invoices and other documents tedious and unromantic work. Then, unlike the present century, a "fair" flawlessly copied journal of say, 60 pages, was viewed as an accomplished piece of workmanship.

The image of the hard-drinking, gout-suffering stereotyped fur trader is slowly being eroded. According to the author, the daily intake of alcohol of Company employees was 3.5 fluid ounces or 110 millilitres, only slightly higher than the modern Canadian's average consumption, and their mortality rates were no worse than other professions.

For the last 20 years the Canadian Parks Service has set an unusually high standard for research and citation and this book is no exception. It is therefore unfortunate that the overall production of the book is undistinguished. There is no index, which seems inexcusable, and as the bonding agent used was non-binding, this reviewer now has 206 loose pages. The author, who has undertaken this original research at considerable time and expense, and the general public, deserve a manufactured product to match the contents.

---

*Shirlee Anne Smith is Keeper, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba.*

**SEND a**
**GIFT SUBSCRIPTION**
**to a FRIEND . . .**
***It will be greatly appreciated.***
***SUBSCRIBE TODAY!***

# THE PACKET

*Letters, Notes and Opinion*

## Some Talk of Alexander . . . .

Not everyone was in agreement with the glowing qualities of Brigadier James Murray as expressed by Stephen Usherwood in the article "Quebec After the Battle", [*The Beaver,* August/September, 1989].

In a note to the *Mariner's Mirror,* Vol. 51, No. 1 February 1965, the late Christopher Lloyd, under "Remarks on the characters of the principal officers at the Capture of Quebec in 1759", quotes from an anonymous account, evidently written by one of Wolfe's staff, which includes some caustic comments on some of those involved in that action. Of 11 officers, the writer has good words for only five, including Wolfe himself. The others, including Monckton, Townshend and Murray do not fare too well:

"Mr Monckton of a dull capacity and may be properly called Fat Headed — timid and utterly unqualified. A month of his command would be sufficient to ruin that excellent army.

"Mr Townshend of a feeble inconstant mind, his line of life not directed by any first principles, and he is exceedingly subject to very high and very low spirits, his actions have a variegated colour, one while the appearance of success of good nature, at other times of Bitterness; and as his favours are not directed by merit, he is always surrounded by the most indifferent subject in the army. He has a great deal of humour, well stain'd with bawdy, and may be esteemed an excellent Tavern acquaintance. In matters respecting the movements and conduct of an Army, he is without scale: that circle is too large for his capacity and embrace, add to this that in Battle his head turns.

"Mr Murray is the deadly nightshade, the poison of a camp. Envy and Ambition are the only springs that work him. The more brilliant and excellent any character is, the more his Envy is excited and the more he detracts. Neither Honour, Gratitude not anything else that is binding among Mankind are bars to Ambition. Mr Wolfe was the means of his being Brigadier General, in return he was the very bellows of Sedition and Discord and would have been the first Partisan to arraign Mr Wolfe's conduct had the Campaign miscarried, in hopes to succeed to the Command. Add to this he has a great artifice in setting evil spirits afloat in an army, and in persuading people that their merits are not rewarded. He is hot in Action, grave [brave?] from Ambition not Zeal — a tolerable good Commander of a Brigade — anything beyond that is too extensive for him."

The original record is in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (ref.DOD.162/77B).

**J.E. Roberts,**
**Victoria, B.C.**

## Douglas Was Here

I was delighted to see the article by Enid Mallory on George Douglas [*The Beaver,* February/March 1989]. Douglas has long deserved to be better known for his years in the North, and I am glad to hear that his biography is finally being written.

Part of my interest in Douglas' story is personal. Five summers ago, when I was guiding with Arctic Waterways on the Coppermine River, two members of our group out hiking came across a couple of old, hand-carved paddles lying in the moss. The paddles lay beside two parallel logs separated by about 8 feet, and pieces of what looked like canoe ribs lay scattered about. The number of grey, weathered spruce stumps still standing in the area testified that someone had used it as a camp a long time before, but how long before I couldn't guess. At the time I just assumed it was an old trapper's site, and leaving everything in place, we returned to camp.

Three years later, when I was reading through a copy of George Whalley's *The Legend of John Hornby,* my attention was drawn to a photograph taken by George Douglas of Hornby, Harry, and his sled dog Punch posing awkwardly against a backdrop of three terraced, snow-patched hills. I recognized the hills in the background as the Coppermine Mountains, but there was something about the photograph I couldn't place. After staring at the picture for several minutes, I realized what had drawn my attention. In the bottom right-hand corner of the picture the bow of a canoe frame jutted across a large spruce log. The two paddles and the ribs we had seen four years earlier came from the canoe frame which Douglas had made from one of his toboggans in 1912!

Guiding last summer I had a chance to confirm my guess. We landed our rafts on the shore below the site and walked to the top of the plateau. Everything lay just as it had been before. Using Whalley's book as a guide, we held the photograph up against the horizon, and the hills matched perfectly. Without a doubt it was the Hornby and Douglas site.

Being careful not to disturb anything, we examined the site and the remnants of the never-launched canoe Douglas had christened the "Good Hope". Carved spruce tent pegs still stuck at angles from the ground where their tents had stood; curved grey canoe ribs lay fixed to the earth by clumps of lupine and Labrador Tea; and the two weathered paddles still rested against the logs the canoe had lain cross. Even evidence of the "battle of the windbreaks" which the Douglases and Hornby had waged remained. Everything was in excellent shape, despite the 76 years of open exposure.

In *Lands Forlorn* Douglas wrote that they left the canoe frame to amaze whatever Inuit in the future might come across it. Almost eight decades later, the remnants of the "Good Hope" and the legends associated with the men who built it continue to amaze. The first photograph with Enid Mallory's article shows the toboggan when it was still a toboggan.

**Russ Walton,**
**Ottawa, Ontario**


**BACK ISSUES**

**OF THE BEAVER**

A number of back issues are still available for 1960-1988.
Also Binders, Slipcases and Indexes.
For a current price list, please write to:

The Beaver
450 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3C 0E7



## Coming soon in *The Beaver*

● A Voice out of Slavery
A pioneer black editor follows the underground railway to freedom.

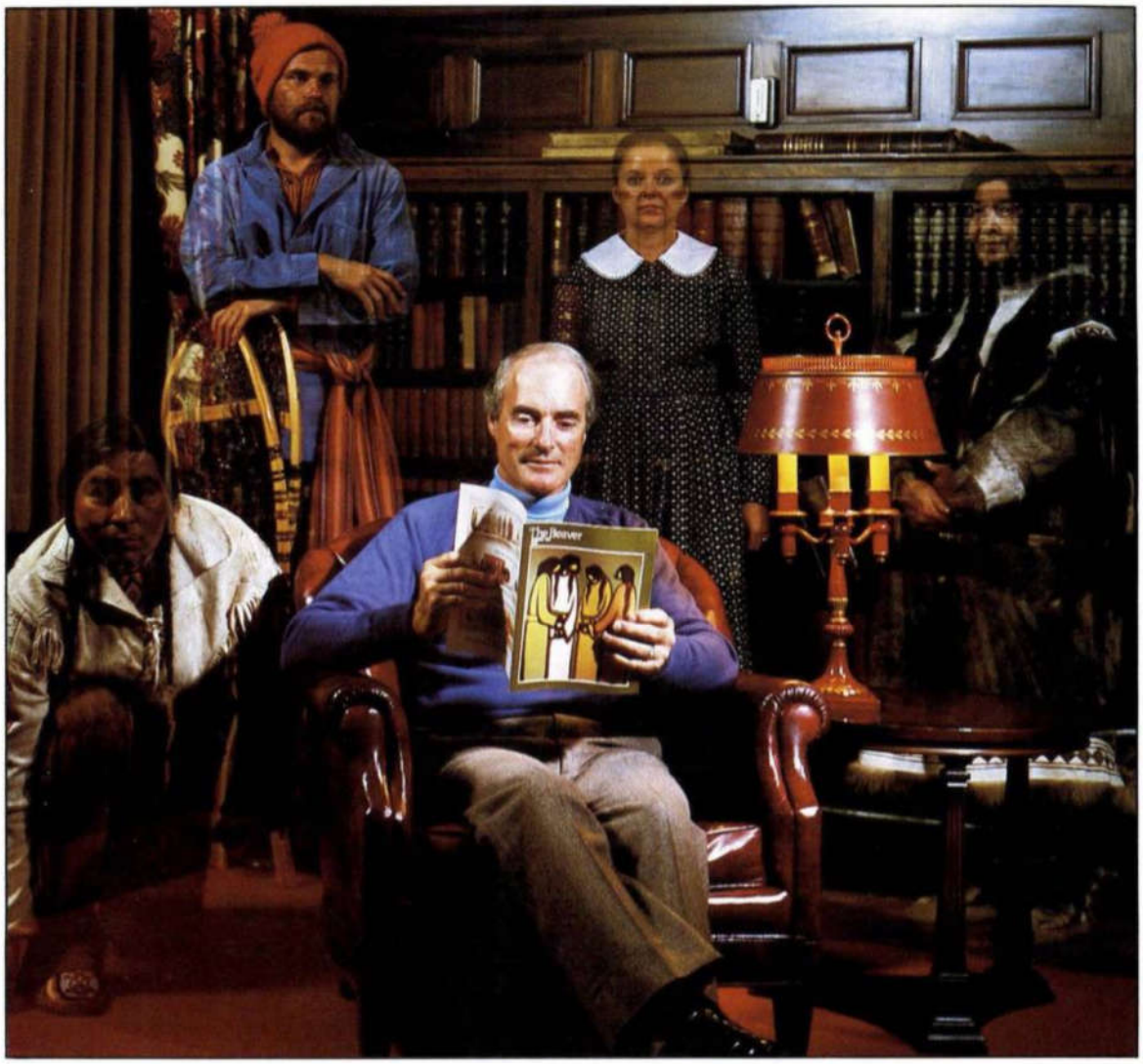
● Revillon Man
Wallace Laird and the Fur Trade, 1924–1931.

● A Poet in the Wilds
Rupert Brooke visits Manitoba cottage country, summer 1913.

● Death of a Liberator
A tragic misunderstanding leads to a fatal border raid, 1838.

*Read these and other fascinating articles and reviews in the February/March 1990 issue of* **The Beaver.**

# A Timeless Gift




*Photographed at the Manitoba Club, Winnipeg*

For the armchair adventurer
or the art lover, historian, collector . . .
or almost anyone with an interest
in the past and present
of this northern country and its people . . .

A gift that is new six times every year;
that will be preserved and enjoyed in years to come.

## The Beaver

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

Subscription rate: $19 year for 6 issues

450 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Man. R3C 0E7